

MILLER DYCE, CHERREL M., Ph.D. *Social Capital as Village Network: Rethinking the Nature of Parental Involvement in the Precollege Preparation of African American Students.* (2009)

Directed by Drs. David Ayers and Deborah Taub. 187 pp.

The purpose of this study was to examine the processes involved in how African American high school students in a southeastern city of the United States of America prepare for college. The social science research literature is saturated with studies regarding the low college enrollment rates of African American students. Analogously, these same studies have tried to uncover “the reasons” for these devastating low enrollment rates. This study was not centered on “the reasons” why African American students are lagging in enrollment, but it employed the related theoretical and conceptual framework of social capital to examine the mechanisms and agencies in the participants’ daily lives that promote precollege preparation. Using an interpretive research paradigm, and building on previous research literature examining precollege preparation, social capital, parental involvement, household transformation, and barriers to school participation, the researcher asked 12 African American students about the role of parental involvement in how they prepared for college. The data revealed that the term parental involvement should be defined more broadly to include kinship and non kinship parental figures. Ultimately, this study uncovered that students utilized a village network model of parental involvement that included the family/community, the church, the school, and extracurricular activities to prepare for college that incorporates the statement “it takes a village to raise a child.”

SOCIAL CAPITAL AS VILLAGE NETWORK: RETHINKING THE NATURE OF
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE PRECOLLEGE PREPARATION
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
2009

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I dedicate this book to my village network without which I would not be
who I am today.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must first give thanks to God for his mercies, guidance, and love. I began this doctorate with the charge that completing this degree would be a testament to my family and community. Today I am proud because the village is rejoicing with the sound of victory.

I give thanks to my dissertation committee: Dr. David Ayers, Dr. Deborah Taub, Dr. Jean Rohr and Dr. Jewell Cooper. I thank you all for your time and commitment and guidance during this process. Special thanks to Dr. David F. Ayers my advisor and mentor, who mentored and guided me from the first day I entered this program, to the completion of it. I am grateful because your encouragement, respect, and support allowed me the creativity to blossom as a scholar. I am grateful to Dr. Taub for her keen advice, support, and student-centered approach during this process. To Dr. Jean Rohr thank you for listening and guiding me when I needed encouragement to go on; and to Dr. Cooper thank you for our frequent discussions and your encouragement during this study.

In addition, I extend my appreciation to the pastors of both churches in this study as well as the 12 participants whose voices provided rich insight regarding precollege preparation.

To my husband Mark and three children—Madeyson, Mark, and Matthew, I love you all. To Mark, I appreciate you for your 100 percent commitment to me finishing this degree. I am eternally grateful for your belief that I can do all things. Without your

dedication completion of this degree would not be possible. To my daughter Madeyson, mama is finally done “doing her homework”.

To my mom, how I appreciate and thank God for your commitment to my education. I especially treasure your firm words of support and motherly advice when I felt overwhelmed. Without your love, commitment, and your belief that I could do anything, I would not be who I am today. This Ph.D. also belongs to you. I love you.

To my grandmother, how I miss and love you. I know that if you were still alive you would be so proud of the young woman you helped raised. This degree recognizes all your hard work. Mama, may you rest in peace.

Special thanks to Jean for always supporting us. You’re a magnificent woman. I also thank Elaine for always being willing to give me feedback on my work even when she was busy. I am also grateful to my friend Carolyn for her welcoming spirit, guidance, and love during this process.

To my extended family know that your many prayers and well wishes were carried by the wind across land, ocean, and sea, and were received with great joy. As a result, my feet were kept firmly planted to completing this degree. Know that out of many we are one.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Research Problem

Under-representation of African American students in higher education is a societal problem that demands immediate attention if America's colleges and universities are to reflect the racial and ethnic diversification that is occurring in the broader society. The American Council on Education (2007) reported that minority students lag behind their White counterparts in college participation. In 2004 college participation rates of 18- to 24-year-old White high school graduates was 42% compared to 32% of African Americans (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). These alarming statistics have compelled researchers to seek explanations for the low enrollment of African American students in higher education.

Studies Addressing Deficiencies

Recently, an interest in the pre-college preparation processes of racial and ethnic minority students has emerged. One facet of pre-college preparation of interest to researchers is the role of parental involvement (Brown & Madhere, 1996; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, & Efreom, 2005; Perna & Titus, 2005; Smith & Fleming, 2006; Tierney, 2002). Tierney (2002) avers that research on parental involvement is often based on the nuclear family. He recognizes that this definition of family is problematic, and if one is to consider the

role of parental involvement in pre-college preparation of racial and ethnic minority students, the “definition of *family* now needs to be more robust for virtually every group and culture” (Tierney, 2002, p. 590).

Jeynes (2005) posits that social scientist have shown that there are beneficial impacts of parental involvement however many of these studies have not focused on African American students, the sample sizes were too small, or the sample size too specialized. Considering these factors Jeynes (2005) states that “the benefits of parental involvement are well-documented; therefore, there is reason to believe that a high a level of parental involvement could benefit African American children” (p. 260).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to construct a model of parental involvement that is appropriate for African American students. Previous research draws upon a very narrow definition of family, which may be incongruent with family cultures of African American students. In order to address this shortcoming, I seek to develop an understanding of parental involvement from a social capital perspective.

Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as:

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships or mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owed capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (p. 248)

Portes (1998) declares that Bourdieu’s (1986) definition is important, because it focuses on the benefits individuals derive by participating in groups. As such, the profits which

accrue from membership in a group become the basis for solidarity (Portes, 1998). From this perspective, the term parental involvement may be redefined as “village network,” thereby capturing the statement, “it takes a village to raise a child.” Parental involvement as “village network” offers a more robust concept and provides a new lens that may more appropriately reflect the socio-cultural, political, and economic realities of African American students, their communities, and how they prepare for college.

Importance of the Study

The Importance of Parental Involvement

The social sciences are saturated with research on the unsatisfactory educational outcomes of African American students. Many studies have addressed persistence (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; St. John, Hu, Simmons, Carter, & Weber, 2004; Tinto, 1975, 1998), socioeconomic status (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Perna, 2000), recruitment and retention strategies (Flowers, 2004; Tierney, 1999), as well as the systematic and institutionalized barriers affecting African American students in the pipeline to college (Freeman, 1997, 1999; Ogbu, 1992, 1993).

Education has been considered “the great equalizer” in American society (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002, p.1). Despite this belief, college admission rates of African American students continue to be lower than those of their White counterparts. Given this alarming trend, a reframing and deconstruction of the resources available to African American students and their families is paramount. Redefining parental involvement as village network through the lens of social capital reshapes the dominant ideologies surrounding parental involvement as a resource that results in social capital. Such a reshaping of the

dominant view of parental involvement is essential because it recognizes that different ethnic and racial groups differ in terms of how parental involvement as a form of social capital aid in college enrollment (Perna & Titus, 2005). This is important because understandings of how families are involved in their children and the schools in which they attend have changed over the last century (Tierney, 2002).

Definitions of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement and the home environment play a critical role in children's intellectual and social development (Brown & Madhere, 1996; Coleman, 1987; Epstein, 1995; Trotman-Frazier, 2001). This connection between home and school is important to academic development because students spend the majority of their time in these two networks. As such, Jeynes (2005) proposed that "there is a need for researchers to grasp fully the impact of parental involvement among Americans, generally, and African Americans, specifically" (p. 261). Epstein (1995) is credited with having the most widely-used definition of parental involvement, which includes (a) parenting, (b) communication, (c) volunteering, (d) supporting learning at home, (e) participating in decision making, and (f) collaborating with the community. Epstein (1995) describes this definition as the overlapping spheres of influence where each system is synergetic and is interdependent with the other. In the same manner, Trotman-Frazier (2001) conceptualizes parental involvement as a bridge between parents, administrators, and teacher. Given these two definitions of parental involvement, several researchers have shown that parental involvement is associated with greater aspirations of attending college (Brown & Madhere, 1996; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Jeynes, 2005; Perna & Titus,

2005; Sanders, 1998; Yan, 1999). In the following sections I will address the *theoretical considerations of social capital, a comparison of social capital as it relates to other forms of capital, as well as differing scholars perspectives on social capital.*

Theoretical Considerations of Parental Involvement as a Form of Social Capital

The concept of social capital originated in the early 1920s but began to be explored as concept in detail in the 1980s by Bourdieu and Coleman (Dika & Singh, 2002; Lin, 2001) and later Lin (2001) independently explored the concept in relation to educational outcomes, family involvement, and social supports.

There is a growing body of research literature on social capital and its relationship to educational development and outcomes (Dika & Singh, 2002). Social capital theory has been utilized as a framework to examine various psychosocial and socio-cultural aspects related to the daily realities of racial and ethnic minorities in American society. For example, Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003) utilized social capital theory to examine class differences in schools and parent networks. McNeal (1999) used the theory to explore parental involvement in science achievement, Kerpelman and White (2006) to study interpersonal identity and the importance of commitment for low income rural African American teens, Brown II and Davis (2001) as well as Palmer and Gasman (2008) in underscoring the role of African American men at historically Black Colleges, and Tierney and Venegas (2006) in understanding the role of fictive kin in applying for college. Stanton-Salazar (1997) used social capital theory as a framework to help understand the socialization of minority children and youth, as well as Farmer-Hinton

and Adams (2006) in examining the role of school counselors as sources of social capital for Black students preparing for college.

Given the research literature outlining the role of parental involvement in the academic achievement of African American students, as well as the discussion of household transformation and barriers affecting parental involvement, social capital theory becomes a useful theoretical framework to examine the role of parental involvement in the pre-college preparation of African American students. Employing social capital as a theoretical lens to construct a more culturally relevant definition of parental involvement provides a counter discourse to the current deficit model of African American parental involvement. Hence, social capital theory is a more culturally relevant framework because it emphasizes the importance of social, cultural and historical connections involved in African American parental involvement. Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003) caution that the debate regarding the lack of academic progress of African American public school students has been seeded in a deficit model that blames parents. They state “we have to face the fact that if we are going to have the public conversation about African-American student achievement, it will inevitably become a conversation that blames Black parents, Black students, and the Black community” (p. 9). Perry et al. (2003) further highlight that such a view is problematic because it does not examine the daily practices of schools and how such practices provide an atmosphere of underachievement. Perna and Titus (2005) forward a similar sentiment regarding the importance of using social capital theory as a counter discourse, asserting that such a lens is useful because research on parental involvement has often been conceptualized at an

individual level without considering the structural barriers that affect parental involvement and the resources available as a result of such participation.

Lin (2001) asserted that, “social capital is a theory eliciting the central theme that capital is captured in social relations and that its capture evokes structural constraints and opportunity as well as actions and choices on the part of the actors” (p. 3). According to Dika and Singh (2002), not only has social capital theory been consistently examined by social scientist and concerned educational and political constituencies as an avenue to solve continuous educational and social problems but research has also used social capital as a lens to focus on minority populations. In using a social capital lens to examine educational outcomes Lin (2001) further suggests that there are theoretical considerations and underpinning when using a capital theoretic perspective. He states:

social inequality is a major research issue; its etiology demands attention. From the capital theoretic perspective, we may make the initial proposition that inequality in different types of capital, such as human capital and social capital, brings about social inequality, such as in socioeconomic standing and quality of life. (p. 99)

Given this statement from Lin (2001) and the disparities that exist between the numbers of African American students transitioning to college, operationalizing parental involvement as a form of social capital is valuable in exploring educational solutions. Consequently, the exploration of the theoretical framework of social capital has augmented from 1999 to 2001, resulting in 21 published studies regarding social capital in the educational literature (Dika & Singh, 2002). The theory of social capital a concept

that originated in sociology has become a popularized term in educational discourse (Portes, 1998).

Perna and Titus' (2005) study is one of a few studies that has conceptualized parental involvement as form of social capital for racial and ethnic minority students. As a consequence of this study they suggest that parental involvement can be an effective tool in increasing minority college enrollment if resources are present to promote such programs. Therefore, when considering how to operationalize parental involvement it must be noted that Perna and Titus (2005) found that the relationship between parental involvement and college enrollment was different for African American students. In this study I will draw on Perna and Titus' (2005) framework of parental involvement as social capital by redefining parental involvement as village network to capture the social capital that is present in the term village network.

Social Capital in Relation to Other Forms of Capital

The major commonality between the various models of social capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001) is the emphasis “that social capital consists of resources embedded in social relations and social structure, which can be mobilized when an actor wishes to increase the likelihood of success in a purposive action” (Lin, 2001, p. 24). Hence, when unpacking parental involvement as village network through a social capital lens it is important to understand that precollege preparation and the subsequent college enrollment cannot be divorced from the ways in which actors in the social network of the student mobilized to increase the likelihood of college enrollment.

In order to understand how social capital differs from other forms of capital, it becomes important to outline the meanings of physical, human, and cultural capital. According to Coleman (1988), “physical capital is wholly tangible being embodied in observable material forms . . . it embodies tools, machines, and other productive equipment that can be extended to include human capital” (Coleman, 1988, p. S100). “Human capital is less tangible being embodied in skills and knowledge acquired by the individual” (Coleman, 1988, p. S100) and is usually operationalized in terms of education, training, and experience (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001). Human capital adds value to labor. Human capital theory would dictate that the higher the educational level of the individual actor the more human capital he or she possess. Cultural capital involves characteristics of language, one’s belief systems, and cultural knowledge that are attributed to one’s family influences and status in the society (Perna & Titus, 2005). Under this definition of cultural capital, the individuals with the most valued and recognized forms of cultural capital belong to the middle and upper class (Perna & Titus, 2005). In contrast to these other forms of capital, “social capital is less tangible and exists in the relationship among persons . . . like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in the absence would not be possible” (Coleman, 1988, p. S100). Although somewhat less concrete than human capital or physical capital, social capital buffers productive activity and is invested in social relationships through which resources can be borrowed and accessed and utilized by other actors (Coleman, 1988; Lin 2001).

Elementary to the reconstruction of parental involvement as a village network is understanding how social capital is captured by the village. Coleman (1988) helps to clarify how social capital can be seen as less tangible by advancing that “the concept of social capital constitutes both an aid in accounting for different outcomes at the level of individual actors and an aid toward making the micro-to micro transition without elaborating the social structural details through which this occurs” (p. S101). Therefore, if an African American student lacks physical, cultural, or human capital, then social capital becomes important because a student’s relationship or social interaction with family as well as various actors in his or her community can produce resources which can result in capturing capital through social relations (Coleman, 1988). In the case of this study parental involvement through the lens of social capital is redefined as village network and the capital captured by the village is seen as a vehicle that can aid in African American pre-college preparation. Hence, applying the theoretical framework of social capital is relevant to parental involvement and pre-college preparedness because the research literature suggests that although students are strongly affected by the amount of human capital their parent’s possess, it may be irrelevant to educational outcomes if parents are not an important component of their children’s lives (Coleman, 1988). This relates to the aforementioned research that suggests that familial and parental involvement is central to the intellectual development children. In the case of African American students social capital can allow for more meaningful enrollment and participation in higher education by crystallizing the role that race, socioeconomic status,

geographic location, family background and other personal, socio-political and cultural variables have on pre-college preparation.

Differing Perspectives of Social Capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1986) was the first sociologist to analyze the concept of social and cultural capital (Dika & Singh, 2002). His framework of social capital focuses on the way in which certain individuals benefit from their membership in particular groups. According to Dika and Singh (2002),

while Coleman’s model has structural-functionalist roots (going back to Durkheim), Bourdieu’s conceptualization is grounded in theories of social reproduction and symbolic power. As a result social capital has been elaborated in two principal ways: in terms of norms and in terms of access to institutional resources. (p. 32)

Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) work examines the school system in France and examines how power is reproduced to benefit the dominant groups which can diminishes the legitimacy of other cultural groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). For Bourdieu (1986), the educational system reproduces a dominant ideology. Thus, Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as:

the aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owed capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (p. 248)

Within Bourdieu’s interpretation of social capital the “network of relationships” (p. 249) is a result of investment in relationships at individually or collectively, conscious or

unconscious, with the end result of reproducing relationships that can be utilized for a limited or expanded time (Bourdieu, 1986). Such “network of relationships” can help in changing communities, relationships, to ones that reflect a sense of obligation.

Consequently, Bourdieu’s (1977, 1986) conceptualization of social capital is entrenched in institutional access and the benefits that individuals acquire from being members of a particular group (Perna & Titus, 2005; Portes, 1998). Therefore, when examining the role of parental involvement in the pre-college preparation of racial and ethnic minority students, Bourdieu’s (1977, 1986) approach crystallizes and describes the role of institutional barriers that affect college going by African American students.

Coleman’s (1988) interpretation of social capital is cited most frequently in the educational literature (Dika & Singh, 2002). Coleman examines the role of parental involvement as a form of social capital in measuring the educational outcomes of students. Perna and Titus (2005) suggest that Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986) offer two differing conceptualization of social capital. According to Perna and Titus, Coleman’s (1988) perspective of social capital is different because it focuses on norms, trust, and authority that social actors undertake for advancement. Bourdieu’s (1986) iteration of social capital considers the way in which individuals accumulate advantages based on their membership in certain groups (Perna & Titus, 2005). Dika and Singh (2002) also delineated differences in Bourdieu’s and Coleman’s approach. In their analysis, Bourdieu’s social capital theory emphasizes the role of the dominant class in creating capital, while Coleman’s social capital theory examines the communal interconnectedness between trust, information channels, and norms and how these

characteristics create a positive sense of social control. Coleman (1988) defines social capital in the following way:

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities... Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making it possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. Like physical and human capital, social capital is not completely fungible but may be specific to certain activities. A given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others. Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between and among actors. It is not lodged either in the actors themselves or in physical implements of production. (p. 98)

Hence, for Coleman (1988), social capital manifests itself in three forms within the social structures firstly through obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of structures.

Coleman argues that a social structure with obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness is a structure where people are constantly do things for each other. Secondly, social capital is also manifested through information channels. In this case social institutions such as the churches are a form of information channel because it allows individuals access to information from others in the network. The third component are norms and effective sanctions in which the collective interest supersedes individual held perspectives, for example norms in a community can provide support for students who achieve academically. Norms and sanctions in particular are facilitated by closure more specifically intergenerational closure which is defined as “the relations between parents, children, and relations outside the family” (Coleman, 1988, p. S106). Carbonaro (1998) suggest that Coleman’s notions of intergenerational closure “is an original conceptual contribution” (p. 298) because prior research studies did not consider the ways in which

relations “among parents, children, children’s friends, and friend’s of parents constitute networks that gather information, forms norms and expectations and enforce standards of behavior” (p. 298). For Coleman, a social network characterized by intergenerational closure is effective in building a closed network with norms and obligations. Coleman’s (1988) analysis gives the example of a social network consisting of school, parents, and children; thus, for Coleman, if this network is shaped at its foundation by intergenerational closure then “intergenerational closure provided a quantity of social capital available to each parent in raising their children not only in matters related to school but in other matters as well” (p. S107). Analogously, Carbonaro (1998) posits that social networks that have lack or limited amounts of closure limits the resources available to parents in their efforts to rear their children

Intergenerational closure as a concept speaks volumes and further provides support for this study, which aims to redefine the term parental involvement into a more robust term—village network. Given the frequency in which Coleman’s conceptualization of social capital is cited, it would not be far reaching to suggest that for Coleman parental involvement as a form of social capital can aid African American families obtain favorable academic outcomes.

Building on the research of Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1977, 1986), Lin (2001) constructed a theory of social capital that focuses on how an actor accesses the resources that are a part of a given network (Perna & Titus, 2005). Lin’s (2001) understanding of social capital differs from Coleman’s (1988) in that he believes that “social capital, as a relational asset, must be distinguished from collective assets and

goods such as culture, norms, trust, and so on” (p. 26). Another area in which Lin’s (2001) articulation of social capital diverges from Bourdieu’s and Coleman’s surrounds the area of intergenerational closure (Coleman, 1988) and solidarity for Bourdieu’s (1986). For Lin (2001), network closure is not necessary for social capital to work:

We define social resources, or social capital, as those resources accessible through social connections. Social capital contains resources (e.g. wealth, power, and reputation, as well as social networks) of other individual actors to whom an individual actor can gain access through direct or indirect social ties. (p. 43)

Perna and Titus (2005) assert that Lin’s (2001) analysis suggests that, despite the emphasis that strong ties or intergenerational closure might work to maintain resources, weaker ties might function as a conduit to access resources and information that are different from those available in one’s social network.

Hence for Lin (2001) information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement are four elements that might explain how social capital functions to aid social action. In terms of college enrollment Lin’s theory of social capital highlights the role of racial and ethnic differences in capturing necessary resources available at school (Perna & Titus, 2005).

Bourdieu’s (1977, 1986) perspective of parental involvement as a form of social capital recognizes the structural barriers in the form of differential access. Coleman’s (1988) perspective acknowledges the primary role of parental involvement and intergenerational closure in shaping cultural and social norms, whereas Lin’s (2001) perspective reflects the role that weak ties play in assisting the family in securing outside network resources.

Summary

The concept of parental involvement as “village network” introduces an empowerment perspective in understanding how African American students prepare for college. If we re-define the family as a village network, we may arrive upon a better understanding of how African American students prepare for college. Hence, in this study, I will examine the processes involved in how African American students prepare for college. The social science research literature is saturated with studies regarding the low college enrollment rates of African American students. Analogously, these same studies have tried to uncover “the reasons” for these devastatingly low enrollment rates. This research study is not centered on “reasons” why African American students are lagging in enrollment but on the mechanisms and agencies in their daily lives that will stem this global societal issue. Hence, this study will adopt a strengths perspective because often studies that focus on “reasons” often result in a victim-blaming approach. In order to underscore the strengths perspective, precollege preparation of African American students will be presented through the theoretical and conceptual framework of social capital. More specifically, social capital will be utilized to rethink the current definition of parental involvement and present a robust understanding of the statement “it takes a village to raise a child.” Such an understanding may establish a theoretical foundation for empowering African American communities, and higher education stakeholders in such a way that promotes college attendance. Hence, the research questions for this study are as follows:

- (1) Whom do students see as parental figures?

- (2) What are the ways in which African American parental involvement supports precollege preparation from a student perspective?
- (3) What meanings do African American students and their parental figures attribute to precollege preparation, college attendance, and college completion?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter the literature concerning parental involvement, precollege preparation and social capital will be discussed. First will be a discussion about influential studies underscoring the importance of parental involvement in the precollege preparation of African American students. Second will be an examination of factors affecting the involvement of African American parents in precollege preparation. Third will be a discussion of the theoretical concept of social capital, which will be the main catalyst for understanding the reconstruction of the term parental involvement to the more culturally relevant concept of village network.

A central theme in all the models of social capital is that embedded in social networks and relationships is capital that can be accessed to encourage meaningful action by a particular actor. So, for example, although African American students might not possess the human capital (parental educational level, jobs) or physical capital (computers, access to the internet) that promotes college enrollment, the social capital that they possess as a result of having a relationship with a school counselor (institutional agent) or a member of their church or family can be ignited to better prepare African American students to attend college. Social capital and the resources embedded in these networks have aided African American communities as well as other minority communities in attaining education, legal justice, employment and health care (Yosso,

2005). Most importantly, when considering African American students' precollege preparation social capital in the form of emotional support and sharing of college information can only nurture and push African Americans students through the college pipeline (Yosso, 2005).

The subsequent influential studies all contain central aspects of social capital as defined by Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Lin (2001). Concomitantly, the studies also discuss concepts central to physical, human, and cultural capital which also play a role in precollege preparation of African American students.

Influential Studies

Brown and Madhere's (1996) study focused on factors that would likely enhance college attendance among African Americans students. Factors examined included parental involvement, high school curriculum, one's life's goal, socioeconomic status, and the amount of time spent watching television. Their sample included 1,394 African American high school students. Brown and Madhere revealed that African American students who aspired to attend college were enrolled in a college preparatory course, had high occupational, had high parental involvement, as well as reasonably high socioeconomic status. Based on these finding, Brown and Madhere suggested that a viable strategy for improving African American student academic achievement should include active parental involvement starting as early and continuing after high school.

Yan (1999) supported Brown and Madhere's (1996) findings that outlined the importance of active parental involvement for African American students. In Yan's study, data were taken from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 and

examined social capital identifiers of 707 successful African American students, 5,293 successful European American students, and 549 other non-successful African American students. Social capital was measured by parent teen interactions, parent school interaction, parent to parent interaction and family norms. In this study African American students were more likely to come from disadvantaged household with less income, parental education, and more likely to be headed by single parents. Additionally, the findings revealed that successful African American students had more parent-teen interaction, as well as more parent and school interaction. In terms of family norms such as watching television and playing with friends African American parents were found to have more rules imposed. African American parents of both successful and non-successful students had less parent to parent interaction than their White counterparts. Overall, Yan (1999) suggests that, despite coming from disadvantaged family backgrounds, African American families had higher or equal levels of parental involvement than White parents. Yan's (1999) study provides some support that despite socioeconomic background, high African American parental involvement is a form of social capital and can have an effect on academic achievement despite the fact that some of these students came from single-parent homes.

Other scholars have corroborated Yan's (1999) conclusions. Jeynes (2005) used data from the National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS) from 1990-1992 which consisted of 18,726 students, of whom 2,260 were African American. Jeynes (2005) employed the general linear model and logistic regression to analyze whether parental involvement had a significant effect on academic achievement and test scores of 12th-

grade African American students. Data for measuring parental involvement were taken from the 1990, 10th-grade data set, while measures of academic achievement came from the 1992, 12th-grade data set. The independent variables were high or low parental involvement, the dependent variables were academic achievement in the form standardized test scores, and being left back a grade. Other variables were gender and socioeconomic status. The findings indicated that parental involvement positively influenced the academic outcomes achieved by African American high school seniors even when the researcher controlled for gender. In terms of the standard deviation of the mean of all the test scores African American students with highly involved parents had test scores with an average a 4.08 difference than those with less involved parents. In addition, the researchers also uncovered that the degree to which parents were involved depended on socioeconomic status (SES). In this study, when the variable of SES was considered the betas for highly involved parents remained positive, on the other hand, the regression coefficients were no longer significant instead just barely approached statistical significant (Jeynes, 2005). The fact that socioeconomic influences parental involvement does not negate the fact that African American parents who were highly involved had a positive effect academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005). Instead this finding provides support for social capital theory and that for African American students human capital might be irrelevant if parents are not involved (Coleman, 1988).

In a similar study, predicting parental involvement in schools the researchers used an economically disadvantage sample of African American parents ($n=159$) from an urban public housing development. For this study, school involvement was defined in

terms of how the parents were involved in schools. Predictors of school involvement were attitudes about education, community engagement behaviors, parental perception of school receptivity, and parents' demographics. Of the 159 randomly selected participants, 95% were mothers or female caregivers, 4% were grandmothers, and 1% were aunts, with ages ranging from 20 to 78 (Overstreet et al., 2005). In terms of socioeconomic status, 38% of the participants had less than a high school education, 58% graduated from high school, and 4% had some college. Average yearly income was approximately \$6,000, with all of the participants receiving assistance from food stamps and other support from public assistance. The participants were interviewed and only data for one child per household were included in the study. Participants' children ranged from Kindergarten to the 12th grade; 65% were enrolled in elementary school, and 35% were attending middle and high school.

Overstreet et al. (2005) established an interconnectedness among parent age, parent education, level of employment, educational aspiration for self and child, voting in the last election, active in the community center, attending church, school receptivity, and school involvement. The most important predictor of school involvement by parents of students in elementary, middle and high school was school receptivity. The results of this study highlights the importance of "the various context surrounding the parent" (p. 109) and again provides support for Coleman's view of social capital being facilitated by intergenerational closure which includes all those social networks surrounding the actor that help to facilitates an action. Despite their economically disadvantage status, the

African American parental figures in this study had high educational aspirations for their students in elementary, middle, and high school. According to the researchers:

It is important to note that parents in the current study reported high educational aspirations for their children. On average parents wanted their children to attend college, which is consistent with the educational aspirations observed in other studies of economically disadvantaged African American parents. (p. 109)

Prior to Overstreet et al. (2005), Hossler and Stage (1992), in creating a structural model of students' predisposition to college, studied 2,497 ninth-graders at 21 high schools in Indiana. These researchers focused on factors such as parental education, family income, gender, ethnicity, parents' expectation of student, GPA, high school activities, and student's educational level plans that influence the decision to attend postsecondary educational institutions. Thus, the combined effect of parental education and expectation exerted the strongest influence on postsecondary plans. Their findings suggest that early intervention regarding college preparation should begin early with efforts aimed at both parents and students. Overall, Hossler and Stage's research highlights the importance of parental involvement in all stages of the college choice process—predisposition, search, and choice. This study has important implications for parental involvement in the precollege preparation of African American students in that research indicates that African American parents have high aspirations for their students; however, these aspirations are not producing increased African American college enrollment. Thus, employing social capital, as in Coleman's (1988) concept of intergenerational closure in the college choice process, may serve as a catalyst to uncover

resources that are embedded in the village networks that can assist African American students and their families in moving from aspiration to realization.

Perna and Titus' (2005) study, which examined racial and ethnic differences in college enrollment, provided additional support for utilizing a social capital lens to examine parental involvement. Data for this study were drawn from eighth-graders (1988) from the second (1992) and third (1994) National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS). All the participants in this sample graduated from high school in 1992, resulting in a total of 9,810 participants from 1,006 high schools. The overarching research questions examined the relationship between parental involvement as a form of social capital and the likelihood of students enrolling in a 2- or 4-year college. The conceptual framework for this study was informed by Bourdieu's (1986), Coleman's (1988), and Lin's (2001) theories of social capital. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to address the research questions. One of the research findings that is relevant to this study is Perna and Titus' (2005) conclusion that even when parental involvement is defined narrowly, Coleman's (1988) articulation of social capital as it relates to social capital appears to aid in college enrollment because of its emphasis on norms and standards. Additionally, the findings indicated that parental norms and standards in conjunction with school and other parent interaction resulted in a greater likelihood of enrolling in a two or four year college. An important finding relevant to precollege preparedness of African American students was the finding that African American parent driven contact with their student's school about academic developments versus parent-student communications about school resulted in more meaningful college enrollment.

Overall this study underscores the sentiment that 2-year or 4-year college enrollment is related to the amount of resources available in a student's network, especially at the school they attend (Perna & Titus, 2005). Because of the high correlation between peers, schools, and the community, social capital as a village network represents a shift in paradigm that can assist in better preparing African American students to move along the pipeline to college.

Building on Epstein's (1995) model of parental involvement, Sanders (1998) conducted a study that examined how support from teachers, family, and the church affect academic achievement as well as school related attitudes and behaviors. Sanders utilized a mixed methods approach in a southeastern school district with a student population that was over 90% African American. More specifically, the participants for this study were 827 African American eight-graders attending 8 of the 19 middle school in this Southeastern city. Attitudinal and behavioral qualities for this study were academic self-concept, achievement ideology, and school behavior (Sanders, 1998). Overall, the results of this study suggest that students' attitudes and feelings about school are enhanced when they are supported by their teachers, family, and the church concurrently. Sanders' study identifies the importance of defining parental involvement more broadly to include the role of community actors such as the Black Church. In short, traditional models of parental involvement often limit their focus on the nuclear family which does not include external actors such as neighborhoods, churches, and community agencies.

Torrez's (2004) study although focusing on three predominantly Mexican immigrant or Mexican American high schools in southern California is applicable when reconstructing a more culturally relevant model of how parental involvement affects the precollege preparation of African American students. She found that, although the school environment presented barriers to school completion for parents, 75% of these parents had a strong desire to see their children graduate from high school and attend college but were not necessarily aware of the academic requirements needed for college enrollment and to better prepare their students for college. Overall, Torrez's study suggests a need for more culturally relevant parental involvement that is based in a model of advocacy that will assist parents with pre-college preparation.

The research presented above documents that parental involvement in the pre-college preparation process African American and other racial and ethnic minority students must include a socio-cultural connection between home and school. Authors of these studies recommend a form of early intervention approach and suggest that it is paramount for the parents or family members of racial and ethnic minority students to get involved as early as grade eight and continue to be involved through the years leading up to college. The literature also suggests that successful transition to college for racial and ethnic minority students is more effective when parents have an understanding about the school's daily operations and expectations (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). This knowledge is essential because "ethnically diverse families living in poor socio-economic conditions often face sustained isolation from the school culture, which can lead to miscommunication between parents and schools" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, p. 21). In other

words, miscommunication can lead to systematic isolation and to parents feeling that they are not a part of the culture of power which can lead to isolation (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Thus, Delgado-Gaitan's model of parental involvement as well as the other influential parental involvement studies suggests a cooperative approach between parents and schools. In a similar manner, Freeman (1999) suggests that any intervention to address more meaningful college enrollment must take into consideration the role of culture "otherwise, any programs or solutions developed by educational institutions possibly might be based on models that may not fit the circumstances of these students (Freeman, 1999, p. 8).

Factors Affecting Parental Involvement for African American Students

Embedded in the literature on the role of parental involvement in the precollege preparation for racial and ethnic minority students is an emphasis on the socio-cultural context of household transformation, as well as the barriers affecting parental involvement for parents of racial and ethnic minority students. These two elements are fundamental in understanding the contextual framework of how parental involvement differs for racial and ethnic minority students and future research must be cognizant of these characteristics.

Household Transformation

Family transformation. The myriad of research on parental involvement and college preparation for racial and ethnic minorities cautions the reader to examine the cultural and socio-economic configuration of these households in understanding how this affects academic achievement. Coleman (1987) presented an historical analysis of the

role of families and schools. He outlines that before this century children were reared and developed in context of the home and neighborhood (Coleman, 1987). As a result the training, socialization, and development of children were fostered within the nexus of the household or community. Hence, for Coleman economical and structural elements were centered on family relations.

Household transformation has shifted and economic production and activities were moved outside the household (Coleman, 1987). The household is no longer seen as the main connecting social network for families. In many cases this has been replaced by what Coleman (1987) entitles a change in the “locus of dependency” (p. 33). Parents and families are now caught in the conundrum of trying to manage the demands of work, child-care and school, as well as other responsibilities. Factors such as the movement of work outside the domain of the household and the division and classification of work have all resulted in the schools becoming the main socialization agent for children (Coleman, 1987) This is particularly important due to an increase in single-parent households and families where both parents are employed full-time (Coleman, 1987). Hence, Coleman posits that the shift in household transformation has resulted in an “erosion of social capital available to children and youth, both within the family and outside of it” (p. 37). In conjunction he declares that this transformation in particular the separation between church and state has been harmful to disadvantaged communities “and particularly harmful to Black children” (p. 37). Coleman forwards:

This separation has prevented the school’s making use of the social capital surrounding the church (an institution used more by those of low socio-economic status than those of high socio-economic status) to support the goals of the school.

In many Black communities the most powerful community institution is the church; but schools cannot aid churches in aiding children. . . . Thus the disadvantaged are harmed, and the black disadvantaged are especially harmed, by making impossible the use of the social capital that does exist in a setting where this capital is not abundant. (Coleman, 1987, p. 37)

Coleman's (1987, 1988) analysis regarding the importance of the church as a form of social capital in the African American community supports Sanders (1998) and Overstreet et al. (2005) findings regarding the role of village networks such as the church and community centers in building and providing resources that can assist with precollege preparation leading to more meaningful enrollments of African American students in institutions of higher education. Brown and Gary (1991) in their research on religious socialization and educational attainment suggest that the church and religiously affiliated activities acted as socializing agents for the African American community. Their research findings suggested that religious socialization can affect educational attainment of African Americans individuals. Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) maintain that "the Black church continues to hold the allegiance of large numbers of African American and exerts great influence over their behavior" (p. 428).

Poverty. Congruent to Coleman's (1987) discussion of household transformation is the increase in poverty, particularly in inner-city African American families. Rankin and Quane (2000) suggest that "the economic devastation experienced by many inner-city neighborhoods over the last several decades has fueled interest in the impact of concentrated neighborhood poverty on individual life chances" (p. 139). Furthermore, Rankin and Quane (2000) and Wilson (1996) have pointed to the disappearance of low-skilled manufacturing jobs in the 1970s and the shift toward higher skilled jobs requiring

more education as possible reasons for the increased poverty in African American inner-city communities.

Definition of family. Interconnected to the transformation of household and socioeconomic status is the definition of the word family. As previously stated, Tierney (2002) purports that definition of the word family has been based on the ideal of a nuclear family consisting of a mother, father and two or three children and such definitions limits the village network that is often characteristics of African American families. Stanton-Salazar (1997) asserts a broader socio-cultural analysis of the structure and socialization of minority children. Stanton-Salazar (1997) further maintains that the socialization of minority children should not be confined to the dominant model of the nuclear family instead considerations should be to the social networks that included a wide array of family and community actors that provide the capital to help racial and ethnic minority children develop. In similar manner, Furstenberg's (2005) definition of family more broadly reflects the reality of some African American families. Furstenberg's definition of family "includes membership related by blood, legal ties, adoption, and informal ties including *fictive* or socially agreed upon kinship" (p. 810).

Ruiz and Zhu (2004) in their study examined African American families that are maintained by grandmothers. They provided a definition of the term family that is more appropriate because it captures the concept of social capital as village network. In their definition "African American families have traditionally been described as extended networks with much cooperation and support" (p. 416). Ruiz and Zhu (2004) found that African American grandmothers were more likely to be grandparent caregivers. For

African American students and their families, household transformation and household configuration has had dramatic impacts. According to Tierney (2002), “one ought not to suggest that a mother or father should read to a child to increase educational levels if a grandparent raises the child (p.590). Trotman-Frazier (2001) echoes the above sentiment when relating household transformation and configuration as it relates to single family minority households. She articulates that a number of urban single-family households are headed by females and that few urban minority school-age children come from two-parent families. Clearly, the research on household transformation presented in this section crystallizes central elements in the discussion of parental involvement and African American students. Consequently, the term parental involvement needs to be redefined as village network in order to capture the socio-cultural reconstitution of the African American family. Changing household composition which includes the social, economical, and cultural context that surrounds many racial and ethnic minority students has enabled stakeholders to identify some of the barriers affecting parental involvement and pre-college preparation. I will now speak of these barriers.

Barriers Affecting Parental Involvement

Roadblocks to African American Parental Involvement

Gandara’s (2002) analysis of college preparation provides a solid argument in understanding the research on the barriers affecting African American students in the pipeline to higher education by stating that “for the last several decades there has been widespread consensus that something is wrong with the pipeline that leads to and through higher education for minority students” (p. 81). Despite the increase in college attendance

over the past three decades, there is still a wide gap in access to higher education among different racial and ethnic minority groups (Gandara, 2002). According to Gandara (2002), although African American students total 14.3% of the college-going population from 1997-1998, these students were only 11% of those enrollees. An examination of the research literature (Freeman, 1997; Gandara, 2002; Hofferth, Boisjoly, & Duncan, 1998; Trotman-Frazier, 2001) reveals there is an ongoing debate among researchers and theorist as to the specific barriers that affect parental involvement in the pre-college preparation for racial and ethnic minority students. In his discussion of minority students and school success Ogbu (1992) suggest an alternative framework to understand such barriers. This framework encompasses the community forces that affect achievement.

I suggest that an essential key to understanding the differences in school adjustment and academic performance of minority groups is understanding of (a) the cultural models a minority group has with regards to U. S. society and schooling, (b) the cultural language frame of reference of a minority group, (c) the degree of trust or acquiescence the minorities have for White Americans and the societal institution they control (d) the educational strategies that result from the above elements. These four factors are dependent in part on the group's history, its present situation, and its future expectations. They are combined in term community forces. (Ogbu, 1992, p. 289)

Despite the various arguments presented, the literature produces some commonalities that suggest that barriers for parental involvement of racial and ethnic minority students represent a nexus of characteristics that are grounded in cultural, social, and economical complexities.

Analogous to Ogbu's (1992) arguments regarding culture, community, and society is the reality of how human capital can act as barrier to parental involvement. So,

for example, although African American students might not possess the human capital such as education or physical capital such as computers or internet access the social capital accrued from family, friends, and the community can be beneficial in promoting precollege preparation.

Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) in their research examining critical tasks of disadvantaged students applying college posit that there are three critical task facing students in preparing for college, (a) minimal academic qualification, (b) graduating from high school, and (c) applying to a four year institution. Overall, the researchers found that in combating these critical tasks interventions and programmatic strategies aimed at increasing participation of students from lower SES families should be holistic in their approach considering the resources available to the school and the family (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). In addition, Cabrera and La Nasa recommended that parental involvement, participation, and expectation might become magnified if low SES parents understand the interconnectedness of the financial and social benefits of a college education.

Freeman (1997) in her study of 70 African American students in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC focused on the perception of these students as to the barriers that affected their preparation for higher education. College pipeline barriers identified by the study were economic and psychological in nature. Economic barriers, such as the fear of having limited funds, and psychological barriers, such as loss of hope and college never being an option, affected precollege preparedness for these students. In addition, findings from the study also stressed the role of the family, school, and community in offering precollege solutions.

Gandara (2002) identified several “concentric rings of influences” (p. 86) that are involved in producing academic underachievement, and intervention strategies which all affect parental involvement and the pipeline to college for racial and ethnic minority students. These include (a) inequality of neighborhood resources, (b) inequalities in the K-12 schools, (c) lack of peer support, and (d) inequalities in familial cultural and social capital. Thus, Gandara’s model of influences crystallizes the barriers that face minority students and their families in preparing for college. Consequently, this model emphasizes the structural inequalities in resources where parents of racial and ethnic minority students are at a disadvantage in the ring of influence.

In a study of parents’ extra-familial resources such as time, financial assistance, and geographic mobility, Hofferth et al. (1998) interviewed 901 Black and White children from ages 11-16 and again when they were 22 years of age. An interesting finding by the researchers indicated that residential mobility, defined by how often a family moves, was detrimental to the schooling and college attendance, especially for students from low-income families, because relocating for these families can disrupt their social networks and social capital. Hofferth et al.’s research reflects how socio-cultural and geographical barriers affect college attendance for racial and ethnic minority students.

Although dealing with the perspectives of Latino and low-income White parents, Finders and Lewis’ (1994) article aptly titled *Why Some Parents Don’t Come to Schools* provides an analysis of why some parents are absent from school participation that is complimentary to the extant literature regarding African American parental and familial

school participation. As such, the researcher suggest that past school experience of the parent/s, constraints on financial capabilities and time, as well as language and cultural practices must be considered instead of school officials, making the assumption that “absence means noncaring” (p. 50).

In a similar manner, Trotman-Frazier (2001) asserts that family structure and socioeconomic status, parents’ schedule, educational level, and the expectation of administrations and teachers are barriers to parental involvement, especially for urban racial and ethnic minority students. As such, Trotman-Frazier’s model represents not only the structural inequalities in Gandara’s (2002) model, but the psychological and economical barriers presented by Freeman’s (1997) model, and the lack of collaboration and socio-cultural understanding uncovered by Hofferth et al.’s (1998) model.

Clearly, factors involved household transformation and the barrier affecting parental involvement are two significant elements that are embedded in the literature, and are important avenues to critically consider when examining the role of parental involvement in the pre-college preparation of racial and ethnic minority students. Thus, it becomes important for precollege school personnel and K-12 school administrators to examine these factors and develop a “bidirectional sense of engagement wherein parents and family members become actively involved with the school and community agencies in efforts that affirm what I have termed elsewhere as cultural integrity” (Tierney, 2002, p. 599). Such cultural integrity would aid in understanding the socio-cultural, psychological, and economic backgrounds of racial and ethnic minority students (Tierney, 2002). Most importantly, if the purpose of parental involvement is to increase

the overall attendance and college retention of racial and ethnic minority students, then factors that affect the daily lives of these families must be given a legitimate voice and mechanisms must be put in place to address them. In using social capital to create a more culturally relevant understanding of parental involvement this study will use Coleman's conceptualization of social capital because of its emphasis on obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms which are facilitated by intergenerational closure (see Figure 1). I will now discuss in more detail Coleman's (1988) conception of social capital.

Coleman's Framework of Social Capital

Coleman's (1988) analysis of social capital incorporates central aspects relevant to reconstructing parental involvement as village network as well as the extended family networks of some African American families and communities. For Coleman (1988) social capital is seen as a resource for individuals and can be galvanized to produce an action. Social capital is embedded in the social network in and outside the family. Thus, three central forms of social capital that are facilitates action in social networks are, (a) obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness of the structure, (b) information channels, and (c) norms and effective sanctions (Coleman, 1988).

Obligations, Expectations and Trustworthiness

Obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness help to build capital because these structures allow individuals to assist each other, and establish trust and future obligations among the members of the network receiving the assistance (Coleman, 1988). In a sense

this form of social capital can be seen as being governed by reciprocity, mutuality, caring, and future community uplift.

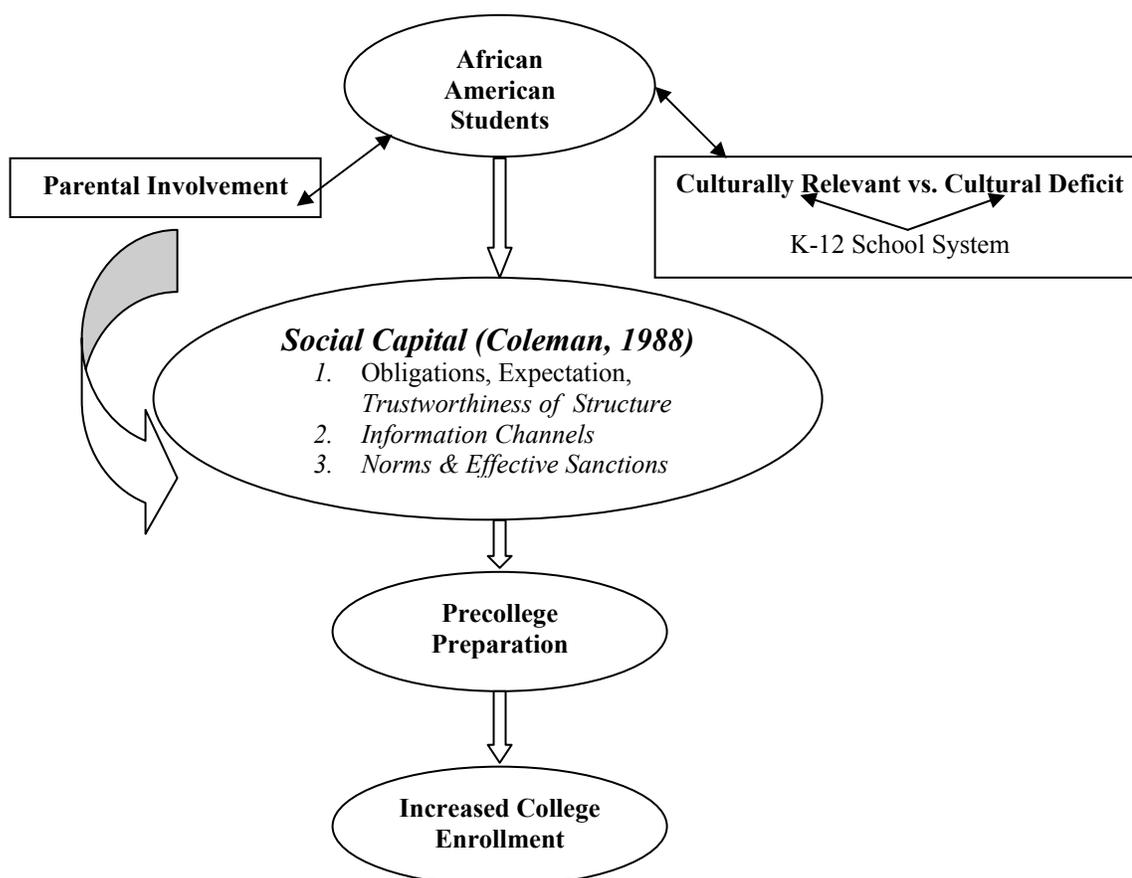


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Parental Involvement as a Form of Social Capital

For Coleman (1988), these kinds of relationships in a given social network allows individuals to amass “credit slips” (p. S102); however, actors in networks that are more individualistic would have fewer credit slips since they are seen as more independent. Hence, I would posit that obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness as forms of social capital are better able to be transformative in social networks that are more communal, extensive, and robust in how kin and non-kinship relationships are defined. In order to

illustrate how obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness operate in a social structure, Coleman provides the example of the rotating-credit associations in Southeast Asia, where members of a community meet once monthly to contribute financially to a central fund, and after a few months every person in this structure collects the amount they contributed, which aids in assisting each member with financial capital to utilize as needed in the community or elsewhere. According to Coleman, such an organization would not be able to exist in a social structure that does not possess trustworthiness because members who received their payouts early could easily not fulfill their obligations and expectations to continue contributing until all members have received their payouts.

In utilizing the theory of social capital to redefine parental involvement to a more robust term such as village network allows for an understanding of how obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness facilitate the processes useful to precollege preparation of African American students. The research literature has provided many examples of the communal and extended networks that exist in many African American communities in the United States of America. Despite urban decay and household transformation some African American families have developed complex social networks that are govern by obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness that assist kin and non-kin members of the village network to care for each other by providing the necessary resources needed for growth and development and in the case of this study college preparation. An example of this is the high numbers of African American grandmothers who are caring for their grandchildren in times of family crisis (Ruiz & Zhu, 2004). It must be noted that such

relationships are a form of social capital because of the high amounts of obligations, expectations and trustworthiness that is needed for such a social structure to function. If obligations, expectations and trustworthiness as forms of social capital are already operating in many African American social structures it would not be frivolous theorizing that these forms of social capital are also at work in how African American students prepare for college.

Information Channels

Information channels also represent a form of social capital. In this case, although the individual actors might not have the necessary information needed to execute a particular action, they can rely on the information channels available in the network to assist with action (Coleman, 1988). According to Coleman (1988), access to information is not always easily available because it requires action on the part of the actor to seeking the information to seek out those in the network that have the information. Most importantly to information channels being seen as a form of social capital is the duality of relationships and how they are used for the purposes for gathering needed information. Viewing information channels as a form of social capital within a given network assumes that the information needed for individual action is available within the network. This has been one of the criticisms of Coleman's theory of social capital because in communities that are disadvantages actors network members might not have access to the information needed to facilitate action. To combat such a criticism, it must be taken into the equation that often individuals tend to seek information from those who are in their social

networks before they approach others whom they might not have trust will give them the necessary information.

To crystallize how information channels operate, Coleman (1988) provides the example that highlights that an individual who is not particularly interested in news events can use their friends and families as secondary sources to provided them with current new events. Hence, in the case of the role of parental involvement and African American precollege preparation, information channels as a form of social capital operates so that the village is able to share information about college preparation and enrollment that might not be readily available to the student. The premise of this study is that if parental involvement is viewed through the lens of social capital then a more culturally relevant definition of parental involvement emerges that takes into account a broader understanding of word “parent.” Parental involvement can be referred to as village network because the village for example the church allows for more access to information channels. Information channels, as a form of social capital, assume a duality of relations. The church, which is an important institution in the African American community (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Coleman, 1987), not only provides a place of religious and spiritual affiliation but also as place where actors can access information about community services, daily living skills, and college preparation.

Norms and Effective Sanctions

Lastly, norms and effective sanctions in a social network are a form of social capital because they regulate how a community or social structure should operate.

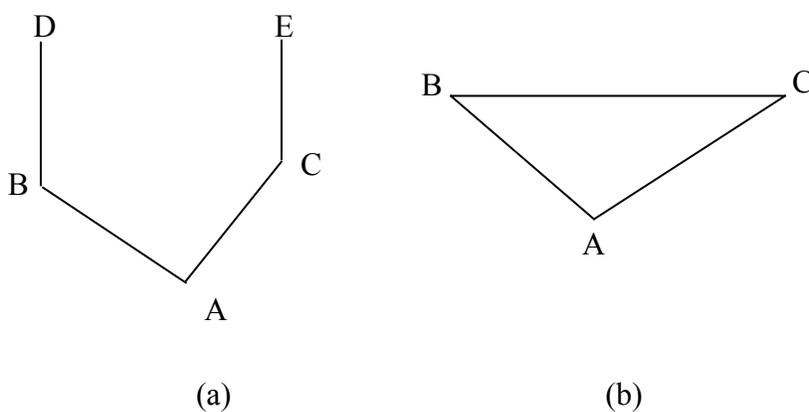
Coleman (1988) cautions that norms and sanctions can be effective but also a fragile form

of social capital because norms and sanctions value the collective well being instead of individual interest and this at times can restrict an individual's action. Thus, in the current climate of the literature underscoring the academic underachievement and troubling enrollment rates of African American students norms in the community that extols the importance of a college education can help to facilitate a more meaningful transition in the pipeline to college. Perna and Titus's (2005) research, which examined the relationship between parental involvement, social capital, and college enrollment for various ethnic and racial groups, sheds some light on Coleman's (1988) conceptualization of norms as a form of social capital can aid in preparing African American students for college because effective norms, if supported by "social support, status, honor, other rewards" (p. S104) can help to provide the empowerment needed for individuals in their social relations to consider the public good over that of private interest. Consequently, for norms to be effective they must be facilitated by closure (Coleman, 1988). Coleman's research using the High School and Beyond data set will further explain the concept of closure as it relates to the theory of social capital.

Closure of Networks

In an effort to explain how social capital is maintained in social relations Coleman uses the concept of closure to explain how social networks produce and maintain social capital in a given network. Figure 2 is an illustration of the concept of closure wherein structure (a) represents a social network that lacks closure. So where person A, B, and C are connected, there is no connection in the structure between D and E. On the other hand, (b) represents a closed structure where the actions of each

individual will affect the other (Coleman, 1988). Coleman believes that closure of a social network is particularly beneficial to two components of social capital discussed earlier—norms and trustworthiness of the structure.



(a) Network Without and With (b) Closure

Adapted from Coleman's (1988) Illustration of Closure

Figure 2. *Illustration of the Concept of Closure*

In the case of norms verbalized by parents to their children, the concept of closure is further expanded by including interaction with actors outside the family which Coleman defines as intergenerational closure. Coleman's research on social capital and family involvement provides a clear example of how these concepts function. Using the High School and Beyond data of students from 893 public schools, 84 Catholic schools, and 27 private schools demonstrated that Catholic school students had the lowest dropout rates. Coleman found that these students had strong social capital in the form of parental involvement and intergenerational closure. From the High School and Beyond data, many of these students attending religiously affiliated school were involved in the community

surrounding the school and attended religious and community services regularly, reflecting strong network ties which are positive measure of intergenerational closure. Coleman's (1988) research provides ample evidence for the importance of intergenerational closure in facilitating social capital because of inclusion on non-kin individual and institutional relationships outside the family. Like the research by Hofferth et al. (1998) previously cited, Coleman cautions that intergenerational closure that is available in a community might not be available to families who move frequently.

In summation, Coleman's conceptualization of social capital will be a central conceptual tool that will guide my research, not only because of its emphasis on intergenerational closure which gives a legitimate analysis to the village concept central to this study, but also because of Coleman's discussion of the public good of social capital. As stated earlier in my introduction, the enrollment rates African American student in institution of higher education is a societal crisis. Interventions are needed to stem this negative blemish on the character of the United States of America. Coleman's research on social capital is in opposition to the dominant ideology of the lone wolf, and the rugged individualism that is rampant in today's society. Coleman (1988) makes an argument that advances the public good of social capital versus the private benefits of human and physical capital. He states:

But most forms of social capital are not like this. For example the kinds of social structure that makes possible social norms and the sanctions that enforce them do not benefit primarily the person or persons whose effort would be necessary to bring them about, but benefit all those who are part of such a structure. (p. S116)

Researcher Carbonaro (1998) uncovered similar benefits of intergenerational closure when he used Coleman's (1988) theory of social capital to examine educational outcomes. Carbonaro studied data of 24,599 eighth-graders, which was collected for the National Education Longitudinal Study in 1988. The students were resurveyed in 1991 and 1992. Carbonaro found that students with more closure tend to be least likely to depart from school before grade 12, and that more closure had a positive effect on math scores. However, closure had no significance on grade 12 grade point average or other subject areas.

Overall, the work of Coleman (1988), Carbonaro (1998) and other researchers provides promising empirical evidence which suggest that social capital can be derived from the relationship between the student and parents, and the relationship between the student's parents and other adults and particularly adults who are connected to the school that the students attend.

The aforementioned research suggests the importance of parental involvement as a form of social capital in relation to educational outcomes. Thus reframing parental involvement from the perspective of social capital results in a new concept that can be classified as village network. Such a classification can be utilized to provide strategies to combat the barriers that affect parental involvement for African American students. In particular, the importance of intergenerational closure is an area of exploration that might increase parental involvement in the pre-college planning of African American students, especially those from single-parent families because intergenerational closure might give parents more access to available social supports and resources within the community.

Despite the difference in the theories of social capital, and the studies linking parental involvement to educational outcomes, the case can be forwarded that a social capital framework for studying parental involvement and the pre-college preparation of racial and ethnic minority students is a framework that is based on empowerment. This empowerment perspective takes into account the resources that are embedded within familial and parental relationships, and places at the core, a belief that all parents, families and social networks have strengths that can be utilized and galvanized to enhance educational outcomes.

Conclusion

As cited throughout this section, the complexities associated with low college attendance for racial and ethnic minority students despite their increasing numbers in the high school population (Hamrick & Stage, 2004), could have their roots in issues related to what Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) call “a predetermined or generic set of ‘parental involvement’ approaches” (p. 255). This study aims to present a perspective that is a strict contrast to the hegemonic definitions of parental involvement. As such, parental involvement is redefined into the term village network which better reflects the daily realities of African Americans students and their families. There is no doubt in the literature that parental involvement has a positive impact on academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005). Although previous studies have been conducted with mainly White students (Jeynes, 2005) there is reason to believe that if parental involvement is redefined to reflect the daily realities of African American students and their families

then the argument can be made that African Americans students will also benefit from such involvement.

Considering that the focus of this study is to understand the participants' social realities the paradigmatic lens for this study is entrenched in a critical interpretivist approach. Hence, social capital in particular Coleman's (1988) conceptualized is a useful tool to tackle the circuitous issue of parental involvement in the precollege preparation of African American students.

In summary, this literature review has presented research that suggests that increased parental involvement is an effective strategy to increase the pre-college preparedness of racial and ethnic minority students, if parental involvement is viewed through the theoretical framework of social capital and encapsulates the reconfiguration of the household as well as the socio-cultural and economic barriers that affect minority students and parents. The research presented in this literature review is not meant to be conclusive but should be taken as a starting point to begin to reframe a colossal societal problem that if left ignored will be detrimental to the society. Hence the research questions for this study are as follows:

- (1) Whom do students see as parental figures?
- (2) What are the ways in which African American parental involvement supports precollege preparation from a student perspective?
- (3) What meanings do African American students and their parental figures attribute to precollege preparation, college attendance, and college completion?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to construct a model of parental involvement that is appropriate for African American students as they prepare for college. Previous research draws upon a very narrow definition of family, which may be incongruent with family cultures of African American students. In order to address this shortcoming, I seek to develop an understanding of parental involvement from a social capital perspective. From this perspective, the term parental involvement may be redefined as “village network,” thereby capturing the statement, “it takes a village to raise a child.” Parental involvement as “village network” offers a more robust concept and provides a new lens that may more appropriately reflect the socio-cultural, political, and economic realities of African American students, college preparation, and their communities. This chapter describes the design of the study, research sites and participants, methods of data collection, data analysis procedures, the role of the researcher, as well as issues of validity and ethics.

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. Whom do students see as parental figures?
2. What are the ways in which African American parental involvement supports precollege preparation from a student perspective?

3. What meanings do African American students and their parental figures attribute to precollege preparation, college attendance, and college completion?

Design of the Study

This study will utilize a qualitative research paradigm. According to Creswell (2003),

a qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e., multiple meanings of individual experiences, meaning socially and historically constructed, with the intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspective (i.e., political, issue-oriented, collaborative, or change-oriented) or both. It also uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded-theory studies, or case studies. The researcher collects open-ended emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data. (p. 18)

I chose to examine the role of parental involvement in the precollege preparation of African American students from a qualitative research paradigm because I want the “voices” of the participants to tell the story. It could be argued that a quantitative approach in the form of surveys might be able to answer the questions posed by this researcher. However, at this point, we do not know what variables are involved in parental involvement of African American students. Thus, a critical interpretivist lens has the potential to uncover these variables because of the emphasis on the social construction of reality, as well as the centering of race and other sociocultural characteristics in this study. Schram (2006) echoes similar sentiments. He states

as an interpretivist researcher, your aim is to understand this complex and constructed reality from the point of view of those who live it. Necessarily, then,

you are focused on particular people, in particular places, at particular times—situating people’s meaning and constructs within and amid specific social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and other contextual factors. Interpretivists operate from the belief that all constructs are equally important and valid. (pp. 44-45)

A second point of reference in support of using a qualitative paradigm is that the literature is saturated with statistics outlining the low enrollment rates of African American students. A qualitative approach supplements the extant literature by providing a context for understanding the narrative behind the numbers.

Hence, the research strategy for this study is a case study. More specifically, this study is an instrumental case study. Stake (2005) declares that a case study is instrumental “if a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization” (p. 445). Such a definition is essential to this study because the 12 participants in this study were selected in order to provide insight into the complexities of how parental involvement, if viewed through the lens of social capital, can help prepare African American students for college. There is a wide array of academic and social commentary and literature on both the college-going rates of African American students and the disparities in achievement between minority and majority students. This study builds on the literature in that it allows for a broader contextual understanding of parental involvement and precollege preparation from the perspectives of the participants. Using an instrumental case study approach for this study allows for a broader understanding of other factors that affect parental involvement. Hence, according to Stake (2005), in an instrumental case study “the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (p. 445).

Research Sites

Selecting my research sites and participants was done by purposeful selection (Maxwell, 2005) where “particular settings, persons and activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 88). Hence, all 12 participants for this study were selected from two local churches in the Southern United States—Gospel Truth Church (of which I am a member) and Amazing Faith Church. (For confidentiality purposes these two churches have been supplied with these pseudonyms.) Senior Pastors of both Gospel Truth and Amazing Faith are churches are female, and both congregations often fellowship together by attending each others’ church events, such as annual health fairs. After I approached the senior pastor of Gospel Truth Church (who is a leader of a pastoral group in the surrounding area) with my research proposal to use Gospel Truth as a research site, she acted as gatekeeper in gaining me access to the pastor and participants of Amazing Faith Church.

In terms of the selection procedures, both pastors were given a written recruitment statement approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that they announced to their congregations. They then asked the parents or guardians in the congregation to meet the researcher at a designated location in the church if they were interested in their student being a part of the study (see Appendix A for recruitment statement). At both churches I met with the parents and explained the study; those who were interested gave their consent for their student to be interviewed. More specifically, the first group of participants was selected from Gospel Truth Church after the senior pastor announced the

study during a Sunday morning worship service. In the interest of full disclosure, I attend Gospel Truth Church and was in attendance the day the senior pastor announced the study. After meeting with the parents at Gospel Truth church, I met separately on the same day with the participants whose parents signed the parental consent form. I then explained the study and asked for their consent. As a result, seven of the 12 participants who signed the child assent form (see Appendixes B, C, D, and E for consent and oral presentations forms), belonged to Gospel Truth Church. The demographics of the 12 participants are listed in Table 1.

The second group of participants for this study was selected from Amazing Faith Church. Unlike Gospel Truth Church, I was not present when the pastor made the announcement of my study, so I was not able to meet with the parents immediately after the announcement as I did at Gospel Truth Church. Instead, I attended a Bible study meeting and presented the study to parents who were interested. After receiving the signed consent forms from these parents, I met separately with the participants at later dates to explain the study and get their consent via a child assent form. As such, five participants for this study were selected from Amazing Faith Church. The demographics for these participants are also listed in Table 1.

Gospel Truth Church

Gospel Truth Church is a religious institution with a congregation of approximately 200. Although the majority of the members are of African American descent, the congregation also comprises members from the Caribbean, as well as some Hispanic/Latino and White families.

Table 1. *Demographics of Participants*

# Name*	Sex	Grade	School*	Type	Church *
1. Cole	M	10	Holmes Academy	Home School	Gospel Truth
2. Patrick	M	10	Buckley High School	Public	Amazing Faith
3. James	M	10	Forest High School	Public	Gospel Truth
4. John	M	10	Fally High School	Public	Gospel Truth
5. Asher	M	10	Fally High School	Public	Gospel Truth
6. Hallie	F	10	Field High School	Public	Gospel Truth
7. Parker	M	12	Park High School	Public	Amazing Faith
8. Slade	M	12	Park High School	Public	Amazing Faith
9. Skye	F	10	Forest High School	Public	Gospel Truth
10. Max	M	10	Winter High School	Public	Gospel Truth
11. Jackson	M	11	Heath High School	Public	Amazing Faith
12. Tara	F	11	Heath High School	Public	Amazing Faith

* pseudonym

In terms of socioeconomic status, the population ranges from working class to middle class families. Gospel Truth provides a wide array of services to its congregation, such as a congregational nurse, health fairs, after-school programming, child and adolescent enrichment that include a yearly trip for children and youth with the senior pastor, marriage and family counseling, and life application classes such as budgeting and estate planning and various other church-related activities.

Amazing Faith Church

Amazing Faith has a population of approximately 50 congregants, with most of the members being African American working class families. Although Amazing Faith Church does not provide the multitude of services as Gospel Truth, such as a congregational nurse and after-school program, other services include health fairs and family and marriage counseling, as well as child and adolescent services.

Participants

The participants in this study were 12 African American high school students selected from two local churches (Gospel Truth and Amazing Faith); nine were male, and three female. Combined, the 12 participants represented eight different high schools in the surrounding area; seven were public institutions, and one was a home school. Study participants were purposely selected to meet the following criteria: (a) race (African American), (b) enrollment in grade 10, 11, or 12, and (c) had a plan for going to a two-year community college or four-year college or university.

Of the 12 participants, there were two sets of siblings; two were male fraternal twins, and two were brother and sister. The majority of the participants regularly attended

church, with some having leadership responsibilities in their respective churches such as usher, belonging to the dance ministry and youth choir. Additionally, all the participants' parents attend the respective churches on a regular basis and are actively involved in church related activities with some of the parents occupying leadership positions in the church. Also, two of the participants were the children of one of the senior pastors. All 12 participants took part in both interviews, and 10 participants were present for the focus group. Sixteen of the 24 interviews were conducted at the participants' homes, two interviews were conducted at Amazing Faith, and the other six were conducted at Gospel Truth Church. The focus group was conducted at the home of the researcher.

Researcher Role

According to Schram (2006), researchers should consider seriously the impact of presence, selectivity and subjectivity, in their research endeavors. Peshkin (1988) echoes similar sentiments in his discussion of the importance of social science researchers making their subjectivity conscious. He states that “when their subjectivity remains unconscious, they insinuate rather than knowingly clarify their personal stakes” (p. 17). It is for this reason that it is important for me to clarify my position on my meanings of parental involvement, family, schooling, and social capital.

I am interested in how parental involvement, broadly construed, supports precollege preparation of African American students. This issue is of great interest to me not only as a researcher, but also as a Black female who is the mother of three children, as well as one who envisages a future where Black students are entering college at the same rate as their White counterparts (see Appendix F for research identity memo).

I was born in Jamaica, West Indies, and although I had my mother and father, I was raised by the “village.” My grandparents, aunts, and uncles embodied my social capital, as they were all truly vested in my educational outcomes. For example, the “village” made it their priority to ensure that I was becoming fully invested in all the educational endeavors they deemed necessary for my future wellbeing. I am certain that the success that I have achieved educationally is a direct result of being nurtured by the “village.” As a consequence of my rearing, I truly believe that, if parental involvement can be redefined as a “village network,” then the endless social capital present in this new definition might be the catalyst that will increase enrollment rates of African American students in institutions of higher education.

In addition, I recognized that since I attend services at one of the research sites in my study, this might have an effect on the study. During the interviews, I felt that I was able to build rapport more quickly with the participants from Gospel Truth Church, because they all knew me prior to the study. In addition, I was very clear in my presentation to the parents, as well as the participants, what the requirements for the study would be. I also made it clear that participants’ names would not be published. I believe these actions assisted in building the research relationship and the overall trustworthiness of the data.

In the last two paragraphs I have outlined areas of my research study that are relevant to subjectivity. I believe that acknowledging my socially constructed perspective allowed me to understand and become aware of how these meanings “filter,

skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17).

In order to analyze my role as a researcher critically as it relates to the participants’ voices, I was very cognizant of what I addressed in the study versus what I left out. To buffer this, I utilized member checking, triangulation, and peer examination to ensure that I was accurately representing the oral narratives of the participants.

Methods of Data Collection

Data collected for this study took the form of two semi-structured interviews and a focus group. Creswell (2005) argues that an advantage of interviews are “that they provide useful information when you cannot directly observe participants and they permit participants to describe detailed personal information” (p. 215). Stake (1995) adds that case study research allows the researcher to gather the “descriptions and interpretations of others” (p. 64) and as a result, “qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). Given the explanations of the role of interviews in qualitative research, interviewing the participants was a logical method for this study because the interviews provided valuable insights into who the participants considered parental figures, the ways in which these parental figures assist or not assist in precollege preparation, and what these behaviors mean to the students. All protocols and procedural guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) were followed while conducting this study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

After receiving approval from the IRB the pastors of Gospel Truth and Amazing Faith Churches announced the study to their congregation. After receiving consent from the parents and assent from their students I conducted two sets of semi-structure interviews with all 12 participants. Most of the interviews were approximately 40 to 60 minutes in length, with 16 of the interviews conducted at the participants' homes, and the other 8 collected at either Gospel Truth or Amazing Faith Church. Conducting interviews in a setting that is familiar to participant is beneficial (H. Carlone, personal communication, March 1, 2007) to the trustworthiness of the data as well as validity because participants often feel more comfortable in their own environments.

Because I wanted to clarify central domains and concepts in my study, as well as operationalize certain concepts such as social capital, I decided on semi-structured interview (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999) questions (see Appendixes G and H for interview protocols). In addition, I used Kvale's (1996) approach of repeating significant questions. He states, "repeating significant words of an answer leads to further elaborations" (p. 133). I executed this technique throughout the interviews, which yielded rich and deep responses from the participants. It also supported issues of validity and triangulation as I was able to clarify statements made by the participants, thereby uncovering a deeper meaning of the role of parental figures in precollege preparation.

The first sets interviews were conducted at the beginning of the Fall semester and the second set approximately one month later. Each participant was interviewed twice, and there were three-four weeks between each interview. Each interview was recorded

and transcribed for analysis. After each interview, I reflected in a research journal reactions to the interview, salient issues, and emergent themes. Finally, each interview was transcribed verbatim for analysis. All the names of the participants were changed for confidentiality, and when referring to a participant, only pseudonyms were used during this study.

Focus Group

In addition to the two interviews, I conducted a 90-minute focus group (see Appendix I for focus group protocol) as a way of bringing the students together for member checking and clarifying common themes. I decided to conduct the focus group after the two sets of interviews because the focus group allows for the triangulation of interview and focus group data especially of issues that need more clarity after the interviews (Morgan, 1988). Most importantly, Morgan (1988) avers that “the hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in the group” (p. 12). As a result, the focus group was an important avenue of triangulation and cross-validation for me because after creating emerging themes from both sets of interviews my focus group protocol allowed further insight on the conclusions that were drawn from the interviews, as well as seeing the group’s interaction to the topics presented (Morgan, 1988). The focus group was conducted at my home, and 10 of the 12 participants attended. The participants’ responses were audio recorded and later analyzed.

Additionally, in the focus group my role was that of a participant observer (Spradley, 1980). According to Spradley (1980), participant observers observe and

engage people, activities, or both of a given situation. Some of the participants, especially those recruited from Gospel Truth Church, already knew me before consenting to be in my study, and because of this, it was not possible for me to remain on the sidelines of the focus group discussion. Hence, assuming the role of a participant observer was useful in maintaining the group dynamics as well as encouraging deeper discourse into heated topics and discussion.

In reflecting on the data collection methods and how they are related to my research questions, I recall Maxwell (2005), who states that “there is no way to mechanically ‘convert’ research questions into methods; your methods are the *means* to answering your research questions” (p. 92). I argue that my interview and focus protocols were designed in a semi-structured way that directly informs my overarching research questions. In addition, probing, follow-up questioning, and repeating significant phrases allow me to “correlate etic and emic issues of research” (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 31). Table 2 presents my research matrix, which displays how my research questions correlated with the data sources used for this study.

Methods of Analysis

According to Maxwell (2005), data analysis is perhaps “the most mysterious aspect of qualitative research” (p. 94). Despite this statement, Maxwell (2005), Peshkin (2000), and Anfara et al. (2002) provide sound and usable strategies for data analysis. In the case of this study, my overarching approach to analyzing data was centered on this statement by Peshkin (2000): “I conclude my work with the best constructions I can create, trusting that I have steered clear of such self-deception and self-delusion that

would undermine my commitment to reason, logic, and coherence, and the like that I strive for” (p. 9). In accordance with Peshkin’s statement, after each interview I listened to the tapes and created a matrix that included my gut feelings, reaction to the interview, interview observations, and emerging themes and future questions. From the initial 12 interviews, I developed a second set of interview questions as well as a general set of focus group questions. All the interviews and the focus group were then coded for analysis.

Table 2. Research Question Matrix and Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources	
	Interviews	Focus Groups
Whom do students see as parental figures?	X	X
What are the ways in which African American parental involvement support precollege preparation from a student perspective?	X	X
What meanings do African American students and their parental figures attribute to precollege preparation, college attendance, and college completion?	X	X

In analyzing the data I used Spradley’s Semantic Structure Analysis (Spradley, 1980) to code and analyze. Spradley’s analysis involves searching for cultural patterns that can assist in describing and making connection of data. The first stage in this process

is to conduct a domain analysis to look for cultural meanings. Cultural meanings involve “patterns of behavior, artifacts, and knowledge that people have learned or created” (Spradley, 1980, p. 86).

Domain Analysis

Examples of domain analysis for this study included:

1. Kinds of parental figures
2. Results of poor school behavior
3. Reasons for school involvement
4. College is a place for
5. Uses of sports
6. Uses of ROTC & Army
7. Ways that parental figures help prepare students for college
8. Ways that students themselves prepare for college
9. Ways to get into college
10. Ways to instill life lessons
11. Ways to be involved in school and school decisions by parental figures
12. Ways to build academic integrity/prepare for college
13. Ways in which present school prepare student for college
14. Characteristics of parental figures
15. Characteristics of what not to do in college

The domain analysis stage is followed by taxonomic analysis, which involves how domains are organized into smaller subsets. Below is an example of taxonomic analysis of the cultural domain of types of parental figures.

Taxonomic Analysis

Types of Parental Figures:

1. Parents
2. Grandparents
3. Godparents
4. Family Friend/ Parent’s Friend
5. Family Aunt
6. Pastor
7. Teacher

The next level of analysis is componential analysis, which involves examining the attributes associated with the cultural meanings. Table 3 is an example the domain of parental figures and meanings the participants attributed to these individuals.

Table 3. Componential Analysis

Domains	Characteristics		
	The Maslowian Supporter	The Life Coach and Teacher	The Village Encourager Pusher
Parents	X	X	X
GrandParents	X	X	X
GodParents	X	X	X
Family Friend		X	
Teacher		X	
Friends Parent/s			X
Pastor		X	X
Family Aunt			X

The final stage is theme analysis, which searches for the relationships in the domain and how they interconnected (Spradley, 1980). In this stage, I looked at the relationships across all the domains and then collapsed the domains to create central themes.

This study examined the processes and mechanisms involved in the role of parental involvement in precollege preparation of African American students. Given the

interconnectedness of these terms to cultural meanings, Spradley's method of data analysis was a useful and visual tool because it allowed me to search for patterns, relationship among parts, and their relationships, which are key components in my study.

Validity

How might I be wrong (Maxwell, 2005)? This important question is central to my research design. Eisenhart and Howe (1992) define validity as "the trustworthiness of inferences drawn from the data" (p. 644). It was paramount that inferences that were drawn from my data are trustworthy; however, Maxwell (2005) cautions that:

the validity of our results are not guaranteed by following some prescribed formula.... instead it depends on the relationship of your conclusion to reality.... Validity is a goal rather than a product; it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. Validity is also relative: It has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context independent property of methods and conclusions. (p. 105)

I strongly believe in the tenets of qualitative research; however, I realize that the literature is saturated with critics who view qualitative findings as "soft." Although I do not agree with such views, my central role was to ensure that my conclusions regarding the findings are valid and rigorously achieved recognizing that there is more than one way to tell a story. Saying this, I believe that the main threats to my study were internal validity as well as the conclusions I inferred in my telling of the informants' stories (researcher bias).

First, in terms of internal validity, the question becomes, "are the participants telling me a true account of their stories and how will I balance this information?" This could be considered a threat to validity; however, the research paradigm is centered in

constructivism, which asserts that participants construct their own reality. This means that the narratives that the participants shared are truly representative of the daily reality, experience, beliefs, and meanings as they construct them. However, there are several steps that I undertook to buffer validity. Strategies such as triangulation and respondent validation (member check) are validity tests that were utilized in this study. In terms of triangulation, I gathered data from both interviews and a focus group, which led to a better assessment of the generality of the explanations that were developed (Maxwell, 2005). In addition, each of the interviews was thorough, using Kvale's (1996) strategy of repeating key words. These aforementioned techniques, as well member checking lessened the threat to the validity of my research.

Second, there is the threat of researcher bias. Merriam (2002) suggests that "investigators should explain their position vis-à-vis the topic being studied, the basis for selecting participants, the context of the study and what values and assumptions might affect data collection and analysis" (p. 26). Merriam labels this as research position or "reflexivity" (p. 26). To mitigate this threat to validity, I have explicitly stated in the methodology section, particularly in the researcher role and researcher identity memo, my assumptions and values that underpin my critical interpretive theoretical lens. More specifically, I have included a researcher identity memo (see Appendix F), which Maxwell (2005) posits will help to clarify the researcher's position. It is my hope that as a result of highlighting my assumptions and values that this will inform the reader "where the self and subject become joined" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17).

My study is an instrumental case study of 12 African American high school students in the Southern United States. In terms of generalizability, by no means will my findings represent the daily realities of every African American high school student preparing for college. Instead, I argue that what is learned from my findings can be transferred to similar situations. On the matter of generalizability, I side with Merriam (2002) when she states that “because qualitative research draws from different assumptions about reality, generalizability needs to be thought of differently from quantitative research” (p. 28). Therefore, although my sample size is small and non-random, which is considered a limitation in terms of positivistic understanding of generalizability, this does not negate the transferability of my findings because I provided a detail description of the participants and their meanings of parental involvement and precollege preparation. This will allow the researcher to make their own comparison in regards to their participants and settings.

Ethics

The ethics of research is concerned with whether the research study is harmful to the participants (Maxwell, 2005). Although I did not envision a major ethical issue, there remained the possibility that because most of the study participants were high school students under 18 years of age, the power differential in the relationship might be suspect in terms of data collection and analysis. This possible ethical issue was addressed in my research design. I instituted safeguards for validity such as member check, triangulation of data, as well as examining researcher reflexivity to address this possible ethical dilemma. An extra level to cross check ethical concerns is that of peer review. Having a

peer review my data assisted in identifying any salient ethical concerns. Considering the ethical concerns in this study, I relied on Merriam's (2002) suggestions as a guideline.

Her guideline states,

all possibilities cannot be anticipated, nor can one's reaction. Examining the assumptions one carries into the research processes--assumptions about the context, participants, data, and the dissemination of knowledge gained through the study—is at least a starting point for conducting an ethical study. (p. 30)

As a result, I ensured that I reflected my participants' meanings, realities, and disclosed my reasons and motivations for conducting this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to construct a model of parental involvement that is appropriate for African American students. Previous research draws upon a very narrow definition of family, which may be incongruent with family cultures of African American students. In order to address this shortcoming, I sought to develop an understanding of parental involvement from a social capital perspective. From this perspective, the term “parental involvement” may be redefined as “village network,” thereby capturing the statement “it takes a village to raise a child.” Parental involvement as “village network” offers a more robust concept and provides a new lens that may more appropriately capture the sociocultural, political, and economic realities of African American students, their communities, and how they prepare for college.

I chose to examine the role of parental involvement in the precollege preparation of African American students from a qualitative research paradigm because I wanted the voices of the participants to tell the story. Hence, the research strategy for this study was a case study. More specifically, this study was an instrumental case study. Studying these students using an instrumental case study approach allowed for a broader contextual understanding of parental involvement and precollege preparation from the perspectives of the participants.

The findings for this study will be presented in the form of answering each research question. The overarching research questions for this study are listed below:

1. Whom do students see as parental figures?
2. What are the ways in which African American parental involvement supports precollege preparation from a student perspective?
3. What meanings do African American students and their parental figures attribute to precollege preparation, college attendance, and college completion?

First, however, I will describe the students who participated in this study.

Participants

The participants in this study were 12 African American high school students selected from two local churches (Gospel Truth and Amazing Faith); nine were males, and three were females (see Table 4). Combined, the 12 participants represented eight different high schools in the surrounding area; seven were public institutions, and one was a home school. Study participants were purposely selected on the basis of (a) race; (b) enrollment in grades 10, 11, or 12; and (c) intent to attend a community college or a baccalaureate-granting college or university. Of the 12 participants, there were two sets of siblings: one set of male fraternal twins, and one set of brother and sister. The majority of the participants attended church regularly, with some having leadership responsibilities in their respective churches, such as ushering, belonging to the dance ministry, and the youth choir.

Table 4. *Demographics of Participants*

# Name*	Sex	Grade	School*	Type	Church *
1. Cole	M	10	Holmes Academy	Home School	Gospel Truth
2. Patrick	M	10	Buckley High School	Public	Amazing Faith
3. James	M	10	Forest High School	Public	Gospel Truth
4. John	M	10	Fally High School	Public	Gospel Truth
5. Asher	M	10	Fally High School	Public	Gospel Truth
6. Hallie	F	10	Field High School	Public	Gospel Truth
7. Parker	M	12	Park High School	Public	Amazing Faith
8. Slade	M	12	Park High School	Public	Amazing Faith
9. Skye	F	10	Forest High School	Public	Gospel Truth
10. Max	M	10	Winter High School	Public	Gospel Truth
11. Jackson	M	11	Heath High School	Public	Amazing Faith
12. Tara	F	11	Heath High School	Public	Amazing Faith

* pseudonym

Additionally, all the participants' parents attend the respective churches on a regular basis and are actively involved in church-related activities with some of the parents occupying leadership positions in the church.

Also, two of the participants were the children of one of the senior pastors. All 12 participants took part in both interviews and 10 participants were present for the focus group. Sixteen of the 24 interviews were conducted at the participants' homes, two interviews were conducted at Amazing Faith, and the other six were conducted at Gospel Truth Church. The focus group was conducted at the home of the researcher.

Research Question One: Whom Do Students See as Parental Figures?

The findings from this study indicated that these 12 participants identified several individuals as parental figures. Likewise, these individuals reflected the village network that surrounded each of these participants and also captured the central characteristics of Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital in that the network of parental figures for each of the participants (a) served as informational channels; (b) established norms and effective sanctions; and (c) instilled a keen sense of obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness. Overall, the participants underscored the important role that each of their parental figures played in their precollege preparation that in combination shaped their desire, will, and future plans for a college degree. In analyzing the data in its totality it is evident that the term parental involvement from the perspective of these participants is more complex, nuanced, and does not always reflect the nuclear family unit that is often seen as the norm in American society.

As shown in Figure 3, 11 of the 12 participants reported that at least one of the individuals whom they identified as parental figures attended college or had some college experience. Despite having such a high percentage of parental figures who have been to college, two thirds of the participants were split in their opinion that “people who have not gone to college cannot help prepare their students for college.” The contention in this split encompasses the complexities between actual college experience and general adult advice about college.

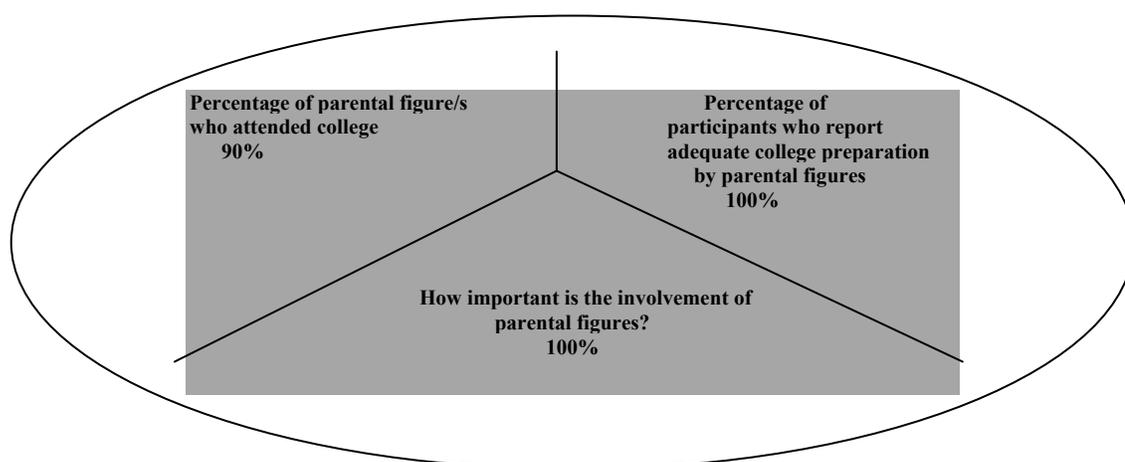


Figure 3. *Background Profiles of Parental Figures*

Hallie echoes this contention best:

Because even if you have not or have not yet gone to college that does not mean that it stops you there, and I believe that you can still help your children out and help make decisions for your child as far as going to college. Just because you didn't go does not mean that they don't have to, and I think you can still encourage and help your child, you know in wanting to go to college. Just because you haven't gone to college does not mean that stops you from teaching your child.

Cole also states his position on whether people who have not gone to college can prepare someone else for college:

You can but you have to give somebody a chance that you didn't have. You can learn from each other because they may know things that you don't know, and they could teach you things that they might have experienced of why they couldn't attend college.

Overall, the general consensus was that college experience was an important attribute of parental figures. On the other hand, students also valued the advice of adults who did not have college experience.

Additionally, although these parental figures had different levels of skills and abilities, and despite the contention over actual college experience versus adult experience, when asked the question "In what ways are your parental figures not preparing you for college?" all 12 of the participants felt that they were being prepared sufficiently by their parental figures.

Furthermore, all participants felt that, if their current parental figures were not involved in their college preparation, then preparing for college would be different for them. This statement from Skye reflects the general sentiment regarding the important role that these parental figures play in precollege preparation:

I don't think that I would really care about my grades to be real like. Because, when I was little, I used to get bad grades and I just wanted to give up. But, if it wasn't for them trying to push me and telling me this and that grade, you can do it and all that stuff, then I don't think I would care.

In summary, the parental figures identified by these students (a) attended college (at least one), (b) were adequately preparing them for college with the resources available to them, and (c) without their involvement the participants believe that preparing for college would be very different. Table 5 displays a cross section of parental figures as named by the participants.

Table 5. List of Parental Figures

Participants	Parental Figures
Participant 1, Cole	Mother, Father, Godmother, Grandfather, Bishop
Participant 2, Patrick	Mother, Father, Second Mother
Participant 3, James	Mother, Grandmother, Grandfather, Biological Aunt, Pastor
Participant 4, John	Mother, Father
Participant 5, Asher	Mother, Best Friend's Mother
Participant 6, Hallie	Mother, Father, Other Relatives, Godmother, Biological Aunt
Participant 7, Parker	Mother, Father, Biological Aunt
Participant 8, Slade	Mother, Father, Biological Aunt
Participant 9, Skye	Mother, Father, Biological Aunt, Friends Parents, Pastor
Participant 10, Max	Mother, Godparents, Teacher
Participant 11, Jackson	Mother, Father, Teacher
Participant 12, Tara	Mother, Father, Family Aunt

As such one central theme that emerged from this study was that the individuals who the participants saw as parental figures can be divided in two categories of relationships—*kinship and non kinship* relational networks (see Table 6).

Table 6. *Kinship and Non Kinship Relational Networks*

Kinship	Non Kinship
Mother	Godmother
Father	Bishop/Pastor
Grandparents	Teacher
Aunt	Second Mother
Other Relatives	Family Friend
	Family Aunt
	Friends Parent

The theme of kinship and non kinship parental figures reflects Coleman's (1988) conceptualization of social capital, in particular the concept of intergenerational closure because of the extensive networks of individuals involved in preparing the participants for college. Also, the categorization of parental figures into kinship and non kinship networks reflects the work of Fordham (1988), as well as Tierney and Venegas (2006), in their use of the concept fictive kin to refer to relationships among non blood individuals as it pertains to sociocultural networks. Hence, descriptively parental figures included references to biological mothers (12), biological fathers (9), biological aunt (5),

godparents (4), grandmothers (1), grandfathers (2), teachers (2), friend's parents (1), family aunt (1), pastor/bishop (3), second mother (1), and other relatives (1). Numerically the 12 participants identified a total of 42 individuals (see Table 5) whom they directly mentioned as parental figures. Importantly, this network became more expansive as the students discussed other aspects of parental involvement and college preparation. This will be discussed in more detail in Research Question Two.

Summary: Research Question One

The findings from research question one reveal that at least one of the parental figures mentioned by the participants attended college, that the participants perceived these figures as adequately preparing them for college, and that these figures were overall essential to the college preparation process. In addition, these parental figures belonged to kinship and non kinship relational networks that work in collaboration to promote college preparation. Kinship parental figures were related to the participants by blood ties, while non kinship figures had non-blood ties to the participants. This highlights the importance of using a broader definition of parental involvement when examining how African American students prepare for college because the networks of individuals involved in such preparation does not always reflect the dominant image of nuclear family that is so often the subject of research. The ways in which these parental figures support precollege preparation will be discussed in research question two.

Research Question Two: What are the Ways in Which African American Parental Involvement Supports Precollege Preparation from a Student Perspective?

Originally, Research Question Two focused on the ways in which parental involvement supported precollege preparation, however after examining the data, research question two was expanded to include the roles of parental figures as well as other individuals within the village network who also support precollege preparation. These individuals were affiliated with institutions embedded within the community network. The first major finding related to this research question was that parental figures in kinship and nonkinship relationships with the participants supported precollege preparation in roles as The Maslownian Supporter, The Life Coach and Teacher, and The Villager Encourager/Pusher. A second major finding was that from an institutional perspective the family/community, school, church, and extracurricular activities functioned as institutions within the village network to foster broader social and institutional support that also supported precollege preparation. A third major finding was that both parental figures and the institutions in the village functioned in together to promote early college discourse with the participants, to outline cognitive behavioral attributes, and to practice academic conditioning and involvement.

I now discuss the roles of parental figures in precollege preparation. Following this discussion, I outline the role of institutional affiliations in the network and their role in promoting college preparation and attendance. Finally, I present a discussion of the timing, function, and nature of preparatory discourse as these related to college preparation.

Characteristics of Kinship and Non Kinship Relational Networks

As stated earlier, each individual mentioned as a parental figure performed various functions in how each participant prepared for college. Kinship and non kinship parental figures ensured that information about college was shared, reflected the norms and sanctions of the network, and served as a constant reminder of what was expected of the students, which are all central aspects of social networks that create social capital (Coleman, 1988). Given the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Two as well as the themes emerging from the data, parental figures played the following roles in precollege preparation: *The Maslowian Supporter*, *The Life Coach and Teacher*, and *The Village Encourager/Pusher*. Each is discussed below.

Maslowian supporter. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory purports that individuals have predetermined needs that are categorized by five levels: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization (Lefrancois, 1990). Hence, The Maslowian Supporter's role in college preparation is to ensure that the participant's daily living needs are met, such as the need for food and shelter, safety, a sense of belonging and an overall sense of self in the world. This category most often included kinship parental figures but a few non kinship parental figures were a part of this category as well. Cole's reflection provides an understanding of this kind of parental figure.

Interviewer: So, tell me why you gave me all these people. Tell me why these people are parental figures to you. The first person you said was your godmother. Why is she like a parent or parental figure to you?

Cole: Godparent . . . like she treats me as if I am her own. OK . . . like if I am with her that night and my parents are gone and I am hungry or something she will feed me and then she makes sure I am washed up and cleaned up.

Parker echoes similar sentiments why his mother, father, and aunt are parental figures:

Interviewer: When I asked you about parental figures you automatically said mom, dad, and aunt. So that means these people mean something to you. Right? Cause they are like parents to you?

Parker: They are my parents.

Interviewer: Yeah, but what makes them that way?

Parker: They provide a house, food, clothes, they supply everything. That's basically it.

Jackson also provides an example of how kinship and non kinship parental figures overlap in their characteristics as the Maslowian Supporter.

My mom and dad buy my clothes and stuff and keep me fed. And then a specific example of my teacher is when they try to teach you something that's not like they just saying it; it's like they actually trying to help you get it. Like if you don't get it then they might come to you one-on-one and try to help you get it.

The above examples display how parental figures who occupy the role of the Maslowian Supporter provide the participant with shelter, safety, and esteem, which are considered basic needs in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Lefrancois, 1990). The teacher on the other hand provided a sense of guidance, competence and acceptance by spending quality time helping the student with a task.

The life coach and teacher. Parental figures who reflect the Life Coach and Teacher role tend to function as role models for the participants in teaching them various aspects of life that they believe will make students successful in college and life in

general. The Life Coach and Teacher parental figures rely on real life examples, oral traditions, and imagery to help the participant prepare for college, thereby moving college from a reasonable possibility not just a dream. Cole felt that his pastor was a parental figure because of her efforts in teaching him morals, values, responsibility, and consequences.

Interviewer: What about your bishop you said. What makes her such a parental figure?

Cole: Cause she has a lot of advice. Like she can give good advice and in the long run in it will turn out to be just what you needed.

Interviewer: When you say good advice what type of advice? Give me some examples of the types of advice that your bishop has given you?

Cole: She has given me advice like when I was little I used to tell tales a lot and she used to give me stories and what happened.

Interviewer: Like tell tales meaning things that are not true?

Cole: Yes

Cole: And then she used to get on me about how I could turn out if I kept telling fibs. And she gave examples of people and then when I was little she took me to a court hearing and she showed me examples of what would happen if I kept telling fibs.

For Cole, his pastor's efforts to teach and guide him in the importance of morals and values and their importance to decision making was enough for him to understand the consequences of not being honest. In this manner, she became a parental figure for him due to the time and effort she dedicated to taking him to court for a "reality check."

Additionally, there were many more examples of parental figures who assumed the Life Coach and Teacher role. The following are excerpts from various participants as to why certain parental figures function as a Life Coach and Teacher.

1. They try to teach me right from wrong. (Skye)

2. Ms. R stuck out to me because she didn't just try to like teach you this stuff and she didn't like make you feel stupid if you said I don't understand this and everybody in the class goes oooh. She doesn't like make you feel stupid. She just helps you with it. And she did try to explain it well. She broke it down enough to where it was easier to understand. She made it as easy as possible to understand it. And most teachers it was like you should be able to get it on this level. If you don't then whatever. (Jackson)

3. Interviewer: So, would you say then that you missed not having a dad because you said your mom took on the dad role and your grandma took on the mom role? Did you miss the man figure?
 Participant: No cause I also got my grandpa. He was like when my mom tell me something he also tells me . . . like she couldn't tell me what a man does cause she is not a man. But I go to him and he tells me like what. Like when I first tried to shave I messed up and he said I'm not supposed to shave yet cause I'm too young like a man. (James)

As shown in these statements from the participants the role of the Life Coach and Teacher helps to promote college preparation via teaching and modeling skills such as critical thinking, and problem solving, which allows the participants to understand consequences, morals, values, and daily living skills which important aspects of college preparation.

The village encourager and pusher. The Village Encourager and Pusher type appeared frequently when the participants spoke about parental figures who assumed both kinship and non kinship roles. The Village Encourager and Pusher parental figures tend to be very concerned about the participants' academic standing and the importance of the participants staying focused on preparing for college. The following are examples from the study.

1. They keep me encouraged and the thought of college in my mind. (Hallie)

2. Probably my mom. Cause she pushes me to do better. And she like really wants me to go to college. (John)
3. If I still knew what I knew now then yeah, but, I still . . . , you struggle so much in school that you would need at least somebody to try to push you other than yourself. (Skye)

Overall, the Village Encourager and Pusher functioned in a way that allowed the students to think constantly about their current academic situation and how it will shape their future career plans. The Village Encourager and Pusher in many instances provided information for the students in their college preparation process, drawing from places such as the internet and books about college preparation. In some instances the Village Encourager and Pusher worked in concert with other parental figures to ensure that the participant was being academically prepared for college. The following quote from James is an example of how the Village Encourager and Pusher functions as a source of information channels as well as establishing obligations and expectations.

James: They [parental figures] make sure I do my work. Make sure I'm in the right classes right now. I'm on the right track to go to college. Basically making sure I'm on the right track.

Interviewer: And how do they do this?

James: When I'm scheduling my classes they make sure I'm taking the right classes or whatever.

Interviewer: And do your mom and grandma do this?

James: And my aunt.

Interviewer: Oh your aunt? All the way from _____? (aunt lives in another state)

James: Yes

Interviewer: OK . . . anything else?

James: Yeah she getting her Ph.D. right now at _____. So she real big on school. Like I said she making sure I'm on the right track and everything.

Interviewer: What does she do? Does she call you? How does she do this?

James: I talk to her almost every night or every other night. She asking me how I'm doing?

Interviewer: And that's important for you? You mentioned how big she is on school. Is that important to you?

James: Yeah cause if she really wasn't there I think I'd be big on school but not as big as I am right now.

Interviewer: What does she do so special that really keeps you going . . . keeps you thinking about going to school?

James: I just know that she loves me and wants the best for me. Like all four of them—my grandma, my mom, my papa, and my auntie. It's like the main reason I do it; do the right thing. Cause if I let them down I think I'm letting myself down.

In summary, the overarching theme in answering the question “who do students see as being parental figures” represents a village network comprising of individuals who are biologically related (kinship) and those not biologically related (non kinship). As such, kinship and non kinship relational networks ranges from biological parents to pastors or teachers. Individuals in the village network occupy multiple roles and characteristics which are identified by the title of The Maslowian Supporter, The Life Coach and Teacher, and The Village Encourager/ Pusher. The data from this study suggest a need to reconfigure our definition of “parental involvement.” In their entirety these 12 participants defined family more broadly than the dominant understanding of family structures whereby the term parental involvement refers to only mother and father. In this study the participants revealed that a family aunt, a pastor, and friends of their parents, and godmothers were important and valid to parental involvement in college. Importantly, it must be noted that the roles of each parental figure overlapped, which reflects Coleman's (1988) concept of intergenerational closure because in the case of these participants there was communication within the network among parents, friends, and the participants. Thus, applying a kin and non kinship conceptualization of parental involvement supports the original contention of this study, that for some African

American students preparing for college, the concept of village network is more appropriate than parental involvement if one is to fully understand the socio-cultural, economic, and historical tenets that govern precollege preparation. The implication for the role of these parental figures will be discussed in Chapter V. I will now discuss the role of institutions that are a part of the broader village network.

Institutional Affiliations

Again, precollege preparation did not just include parental figures but also individuals associated with institutions within the village network. The purpose of asking research Question 2 was to focus inquiry on understanding students' perspective of ways in which parental involvement assists in them preparing for college. Data from research Question 1 revealed that the term parental involvement as well as whom the participants identified as parental figures are much more complex for this population of students. See Figure 4 for an illustration of institutions within the village network.

Family/Community. The family community network for the participants was a physical representation that included their biological family unit as well as the neighborhood surrounding them. This includes friends as well as their parents' friends and acquaintances. The family/community network can be seen as the central driving force of the village because in many cases individuals from this network are the first receivers of information regarding college preparation and then transmit this knowledge to other actors within the network to ensure that the importance of college remains constant. In this study the family/community network was usually headed by one or two biological parents. Included in the family/community network are friends and others in

the community such as other parents. The data revealed that processes involved in creating intergenerational closure (Coleman, 1988) appear to be active in the network of the home. Intergenerational closure is the closure of relationships between parents, friends, students, and others in the network. Data analysis revealed ongoing discussions among the participants' friends and parental figures; however, most participants reported that these conversations are more surface-level discussions such as "what college are you attending" and not necessarily in-depth communications regarding college preparation.

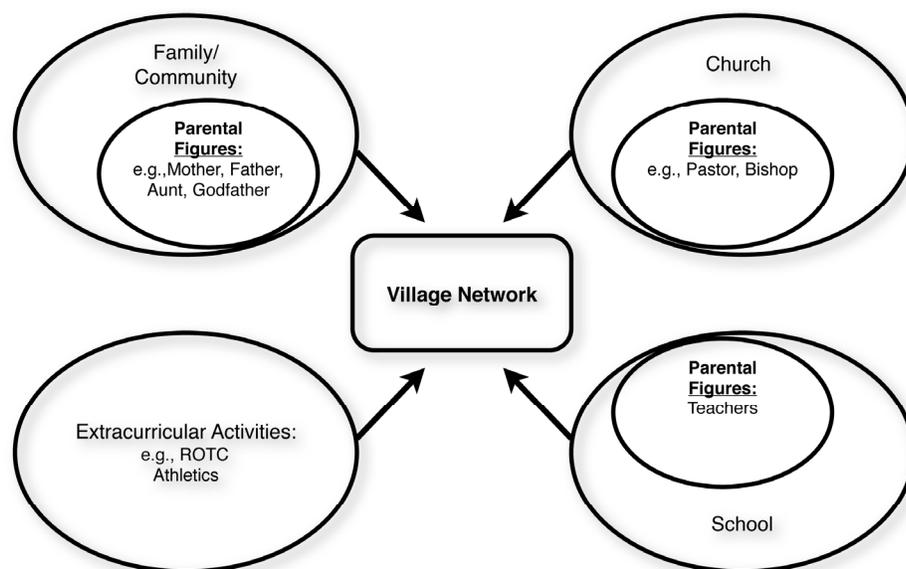


Figure 4. *Village Networks: Institutions*

Similarly, the participants also stated that they talk to their friends about college on a general basis such as what classes they are taking, or what college will be like, but that their friends do not really help with intensive college preparation. However, there appears to be more intensive discussions happening among parental figures, others' parents, and others in the community regarding college preparation. Participants conveyed that

interchange between their parental figures and other parents/community members include references to scholarships, school choice, and overall encouragement of the participant to go to college (see Table 7).

Table 7. *Aspects of Intergenerational Closure Relevant to College Preparation*

Participants	Participant talked To friend/s about College	Parental Figures Talked to other Parents about College Preparation	Parental Figures Talked to Participants Friend/s about College
Participant 1, Cole	X	X	X
Participant 2, Patrick	X		X
Participant 3, James	X	X	X
Participant 4, John		X	
Participant 5, Asher	X	X	X
Participant 6, Hallie	X	X	X
Participant 7, Parker	X	X	X
Participant 8, Slade	X	X	X
Participant 9, Skye	X	X	X
Participant 10, Max	X	X	
Participant 11, Jackson	X	X	
Participant 12, Tara	X	X	X

Church. Similar to the home network is the network of the church, which included references to a bishop/pastor or other members of the congregation as playing

central roles in precollege preparation. For the participants who mentioned the church as an important element of precollege preparation, the church functioned to maintain obligations and expectations, as well as a source for information channels (Coleman, 1988). The church represented not only a lodestone for spiritual fulfillment but a source of information gathering regarding kinds of colleges, sources of scholarships, as well as mentoring and daily life application skills. From both churches, eight of the 12 participants referenced that the church was a network that provided information about college.

School and extracurricular activities. The networks of school and extracurricular activities overlap in terms of their direct influence on each other. Of the 12 participants in this study, eight made direct mention that they were involved in extracurricular activities such as sports or branches of the armed services, such as the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC). These activities were directly related to the school in which the participants attended as well as discussions they had with teachers, counselors, and coaches in this environment. These networks are important because the parental figures who were mentioned in research Question 1 as well as the role they played were directly intertwined with these broader village networks. As a result, each unit of the network (family/community, church, school, extracurricular activities) functioned synergistically in delivering the kind of precollege preparation that they believe the students needed. In accordance with how the various networks functioned the students then ascribed various meanings to this involvement. These ascribed meanings will be discussed in research Question 3. Consequently, in the areas where particular parental figures did not have

access to information or did not have the skills to provide certain types of information, then the participant utilizes the broader network as shown in Figure 4 to move along the pipeline to college. The following quotation from Skye is an example of the various networks of the village working together to support college preparation.

Interviewer: You said everybody is trying to help us—who are these people?
 Skye: Your family, your friends, or some of your friends, your teachers, people at the church, people in the community. I think everybody helps you, because with some things, it's like everybody that you are in with when you are in high school is going to help you with what's going to come when you get to college.

As a result of parental involvement including both the role of parental figures and institutions such as the family/community, church, school, and extracurricular activities, three central themes emerged from the data in terms of the ways in which parental figures and other individuals within the various institutions support precollege preparation—*early college discourse, cognitive behavioral determinants, and academic involvement and conditioning.*

Timing, Function, and Nature of Preparatory Discourses

Once again, Research Question Two focused the analysis on the ways in which African American parental involvement supported precollege preparation from a student perspective. Above, I have discussed the roles played by parental figures and the institutional affiliations of parental figures and others who encourage students to prepare to college. Now I turn the discussion to the specific discourses articulated by these parental figures and other members of the village network. Specifically, I describe the

period in which participants experienced these discourses as well as the nature of these discourses.

Early college discourse. A key finding from this study is the role of early college discussions in the precollege process. In the case of these participants, early discussions about college began in middle school. More specifically, 9 of the 12 participants reported having their first discussion about college in middle school, one participant reported the first discussion taking place in elementary school and two participants reported high school as their first discussion about college. Table 8 presents the distribution of early college discussions.

Early college discourse for many of the participants was linked to the importance of college and the need to begin thinking of college as an option very early. For most of the participants, early dialogue regarding college was initiated by their parental figures and in some cases these discussion left a lasting impression on the participants regarding the correlation between college and academics. Cole explains:

Interviewer: Now I'm going to ask you to think back a little bit. Tell me about your earliest memory, as early as you can remember, about discussing college.

The earliest memory that you have about discussing college?

Cole: I was, I think in the third grade.

Interviewer: Third grade, OK.

Cole: And I told my mom I wanted to go to _____ college

Interviewer: OK.

Cole: Because I like their band.

Interviewer: You liked their band?

Cole: Yeah.

Interviewer: And what did she say?

Cole: She said that's a good choice but you gotta have the academics to go along with it.

Interviewer: OK

Cole: And since then I've been trying to get my academics up.

Interviewer: You said since the third grade you have been trying to get your academics up. Is this because your mom told you that you need academics as well to get to college?

Cole: Yes

Interviewer: So what ways have you tried to get your academics up?

Cole: Trying to pass my tests with 90% or higher, studying, focusing in class, listening, paying attention.

Table 8. Distribution of Early College Discussions

Participant	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
1 Cole	X		
2 Patrick			X
3 James		X	
4 John		X	
5 Asher		X	
6 Hallie		X	
7 Parker			X
8 Slade		X	
9 Skye		X	
10 Max		X	
11 Jackson		X	
12 Tara		X	

For Asher his earliest discussion about college was complex. Although he first mentioned that he did not have any discussion with his parental figures, only his teachers, when probed further he stated that he had discussions with his parental figure in

particular his mother. However, the discussion with his teachers appeared to be more meaningful to him. Below is sample of this discussion:

Interviewer: Here's my next question. Tell me about your earliest memory of involving discussions about college.

Asher: Really didn't have discussions about college. One I can remember is middle school. They talked to you about college. And they asked which college would you like to attend?

Interviewer: You said they talked to you? Who?

Asher: The teachers, Yeah.

Interviewer: And in middle school you are in grade seven, eight?

Asher: Eight

Interviewer: And that's your earliest memory?

Asher: Yeah, earliest

Interviewer: And what did your teachers talk about?

Asher: They were saying that they were preparing us for high school. And they said after high school you want to go to college. Eighth grade is not my earliest memory but eighth grade is the closest one.

Interviewer: Do you think you have other memories of discussing college?

Asher: Yeah, when I was younger in kindergarten and first grade in elementary school they tell you about college. They say if you want to be successful in life, you have to go to college. But that's not so right.

Interviewer: And you heard this at school?

Asher: Yeah, the teachers would tell you this.

Interviewer: Did you hear that from anybody else or only at school?

Asher: Oh no, parents, my mom told me I had to go to college . . .

This discussion with this participant underscores the importance of the broader village network; this was Asher, who did not mention his teachers as parental figures but does include the teacher as a valid information channel source, which provides a clear example of how this participant utilized the social capital existing in the broader village network to access information about precollege preparation.

In addition, the upcoming example also displays the interconnectedness of the village that is displayed in Figure 4. This participant's discussion about college took

place with his football friends, which is an example of the circuitous thread of involvement that is woven among the various social networks occupied by the participants. In the case of this participant, the thread connected the networks of the community and extracurricular activities. In this case, Slade's earliest discussions of college took place with his friends who were members of the football team. Consequently, this participant is now in grade 12 and is hoping to go to college on a football scholarship. He stated:

Interviewer: Think back to your earliest memory involving discussing college. Do you remember when that was? The earliest memory that you have in your mind about discussing college?

Slade: Middle school.

Interviewer: Middle school? Whom did you have the discussion with?

Slade: I think it was a couple football players.

Interviewer: Oh what were you guys discussing?

Slade: Talking about going to school playing football in college.

Interviewer: Oh, playing football in college? Is that what you plan to do now?

Slade: Yes ma'am.

Overall, the theme of early college discourse reflects the connecting role between various actors in the village network. Early college discussions mostly took place in middle school and as early as elementary school with a focus on academics, as well as the role of the broader village network in planting the seed of college preparation with hopes of it germinating into actual college enrollment. On the other hand, there were some of the participants who had early discussion about college but remained somewhat ambivalent about college because discussing college so early seemed a lifetime away given the fact they were not yet in high school.

Hence, what does this early college discourse reveal? According to James:

By now, if they [parental figures] haven't gotten involved by tenth grade or whatever, it is too late.

Additionally, the findings of early college discourse also reveal what others in the literature have surmised—that for some minority students, precollege preparation should begin early and must include parents as well as the student (Hossler & Stage, 1992) in order to ensure that these students utilize the various networks available along the pipeline to college.

Cognitive-behavioral Determinants

Another central theme that emerged from the data in terms of the ways in which African American parental involvement supports precollege preparation is in the form of cognitive-behavioral attributes. These cognitive-behavioral attributes represent foundational support on the road to making college attendance seen as a possibility. Most importantly, these cognitive-behavioral attributes that are displayed by the parental figures reflect the oral tradition or the use of storytelling narratives that are common in the African American cultural milieu. For example, runaway slaves would sing songs coded in meaning and information in order to transmit messages to each other on the way to freedom. The same can be said for these cognitive-behavioral attributes that together promote the message that college preparation is important. This quotation from Skye is a good example of the use of the storytelling narratives:

Sometimes we do talk about college and if we ever do they [parent] bring up stories about what they did, or if I'm having a problem with my homework or something, or if I took a bad test and failed it or something. They will tell me a story, I guess that will help me out like my mom will tell me. I know she likes to

tell me lots of stories about what she did in college and it probably helps me cause I say maybe I shouldn't do this, maybe I should do what she thought she should have done. Like she will say, I wish I had done this, and I'll say OK, and just do it instead of going down the lane like she did.

This is central because all of the participants shared how important going to college was for them and their families. Although the reasons for going to college differed among participants, the key connector was that their parental figures wanted them to go to college and as such provided support as they were able to, given each parental figure's skill and knowledge base. The cognitive-behavioral attributes that support African American precollege preparation are *encouragement*, *cautionary warnings*, *repetition*, and *future goal attainment*. Figure 5 is a depiction of these attributes.

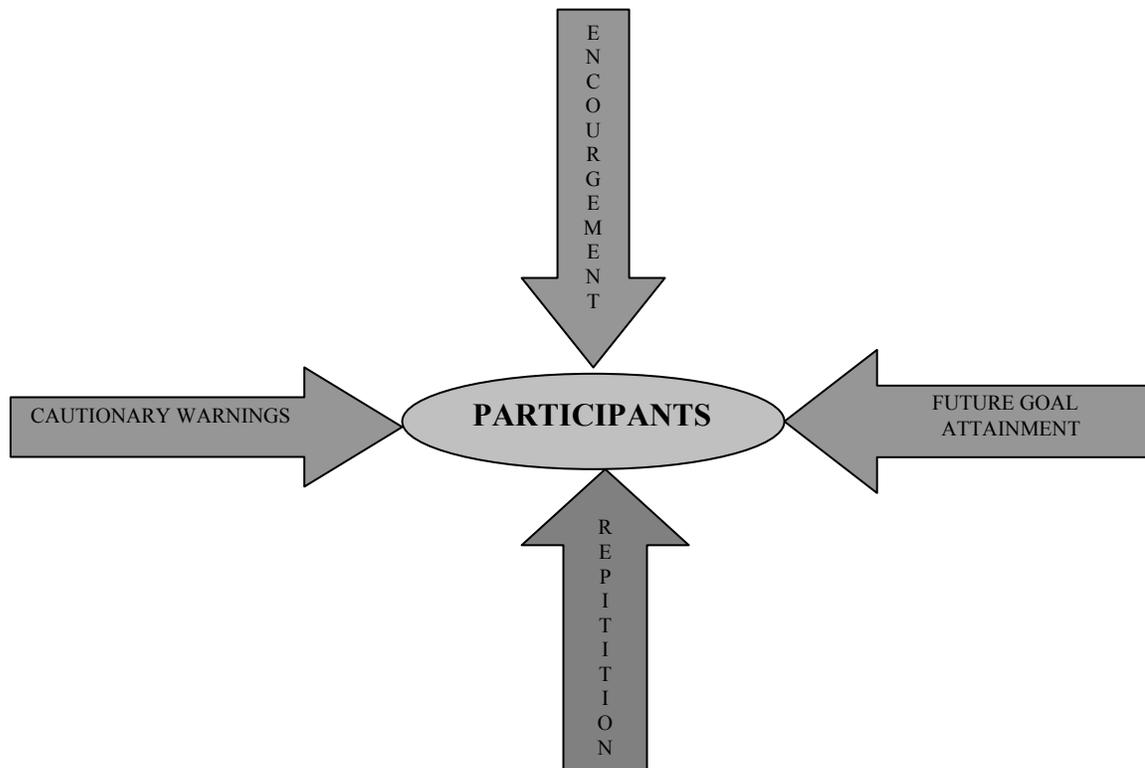


Figure 5. Cognitive-Behavioral Attributes of a Village Network

It is important to note that these attributes change depending on the situation and the message that the parental figure or broader village network's members are trying to transmit. All the attributes seem to be given equal weight in terms of their importance to the students but are asymmetrical in their rotation in that a participant can start at any of the four points of the arrow. I now explain each of these attributes and how they operate to support African American precollege parental involvement.

Encouragement. Encouragement was an important aspect of precollege preparation for most of these participants. To the society at large, encouragement might seem like a simple word, but for these participants encouragement by their social networks was very important as they navigated and prepared for college. Encouragement in the case of these participants was used to help the participants remain committed and in some case helped the participants develop an "I can do it" attitude. When outlining the importance of encouragement this participant verbalized:

Hallie: I probably would think I have to go to college anyway. So I would just go because I have to. I want to go to college to experience different things. But if I wasn't encouraged I probably wouldn't think about it or I probably wouldn't stress college. But with being encouraged it is really good, that boosts you up.

James explained that for him parental involvement included his mother, grandmother, aunt, and grandfather. He clarified in the interview that his mother, grandmother, and aunt took the primary roles in college preparation; however, he respected his grandfather's male perspective because his grandfather's discussions with him caused him to think deeper. His grandfather did not say much, so when he did become involved

his words became very significant. The following quotation displays this relationship as well as the way in which this parental figure used the attribute of encouragement in underscoring the importance of high academic achievement.

James: Like when the progress report came out I got like two Ds, an F, and my mama 'n 'em they were fussing at me but he [grandfather] wasn't fussing, he was like I know you can do better and I need to pull my grades up and that's all he said. But it was like those words he said hit me the worst. It was like I let my grandpa down.

Interviewer: So you didn't feel you let your mom and grandma down?

James: Yeah, but I felt more cause I let my grandpa down.

Interviewer: Why? Explain that to me.

James: Cause like my grandpa he brags at his work about me all the time from basketball to school work and I just let him down.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

James: I was hurt. I was disappointed that I let him down.

Interviewer: So basically, having your grandpa praise you and talk to his friends at work about you that's important to you?

James: It's not, but it's important to me but I don't want to say it's important to me. Like if he wasn't I wouldn't get mad but since he it's like yes he's talking about me. Like I'm doing good.

Interviewer: Ok, and that makes you feel good?

James: Yeah

Overall, these two examples from the interviews show that encouragement becomes a part of the participant's self-esteem and self-concept in terms of understanding what needs to be accomplished on the pipeline to college.

Cautionary warnings. Cautionary warnings were an extremely salient attribute in terms of the shared ways in which the participants perceived parental involvement. In many ways, cautionary warnings functioned to create and maintain norms and sanctions (Coleman, 1988) that, according to Coleman, are key aspects of social networks that allow for social capital to emerge. If the attribute of encouragement functions to maintain self esteem and expectations, then cautionary warning operates like the proverbial "red

flag” to alert the participants of areas of danger. Significantly, parental involvement in the precollege preparation of the participants revolved centrally around warnings regarding adverse social behaviors, with the underlying message that adverse social behaviors will result in loss of academic standing in college. Hence, from the students’ perspective, cautionary warnings included warnings about partying, drugs, sex, lack of structure and rules, relationships with the opposite sex, and discipline while in college. There were many references to these adverse consequences that emerged from the data that I categorized as cautionary warning.

In this example, Cole discusses the importance of making the right decision while in college. This is important because in my first interview with this participant, he discussed how his parental figure cautioned him about the dangers of college. In interview one he stressed:

Cole: My mother last year took me to my brother’s freshman orientation and we stayed the night there. She let me go to the college and see the various activities and programs I can get into. And my father he went as well, he showed me the right way I could go or the wrong way I could go.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Cole: He showed me as you can see it’s like different ethnicities of students walking on campus and he showed me, he said they look like party kids and they were yelling around the school, drinking, and skateboarding and all. He showed me I could either do that or I could get my grades so I could graduate and get my degree.

Then in interview two Cole internalized what his parental figure told him in explaining to the importance of discipline and making the right decisions in college. He explains:

Self discipline—when you are in college is like knowing if somebody tells you to jump off the bridge do you do it. And it’s like you know you have a big test the

next day and you know there is a huge party that night and your friends will tempt you like everybody going to be there and you find out there's something you really want is going to be at the party. You have to make a decision whether you are going to the party or going to study.

Repetition. Repetition as a cognitive behavioral attribute helps to maintain and keep the participants focused on the goal of college enrollment. This method of supporting college preparation resulted in some of the participants stating that they tend to hear the same message from various members of their social network. Furthermore, in few cases, participants forwarded how overbearing the attribute of repetition could become because, according to Cole, "going to college is all she talks about." On the other hand, for some of the participants, repetition kept them focused on college preparation and was a constant reminder of the importance that their parental figures placed on college attendance. The following quotations demonstrate the cognitive behavioral attribute of repetition.

1. Like far as won't be so happy with me if I don't go to college. So all the pressure is on me cause everyday she [mother] talk and say you got to go to college. You need to take high school serious. And a lot of pressure is on me. If I don't go to college then she gonna be mad . . . Her putting pressure on me is not contributing to telling me get ready about college. When someone tells you the same thing for everyday after a while you don't want to do it. You just get frustrated with the person that's saying it. You just like I'm not going to do it. But I'm not saying I won't go to college, I'm just saying period. (Asher)
2. Interviewer: So the coach talked about college? Is it a he or she?
Participant: It's a he
Interviewer: What does he say? Like he talks about college. What does he say?
Participant: He basically tells me the same thing my parents do. Shape up and get right to go to school. (Patrick)
3. Participant: My dad he always talks about college. That's all he talks about.

Interviewer: What else does he do? Does he just talk about it? You have to go to college, you have to go to college. What does he say? Give me some examples of things that he says.

Participant: It's so much, I mean, he say a lot about college every time he see me. It's you need to do this for school so you can get ready for college, so you can grow up and you know how the story is.

Interviewer: No I know my story. I want you to tell me your story. How do you feel when you hear what he tells you? You got to get ready for college. How does that make you feel?

Participant: I mean, I want to go to college but sometimes I get tired of hearing it. (Slade)

Future goal attainment. Goal attainment is an attribute that supports precollege preparation in that this characteristic helped students to envision their desired future state. Future goal attainment acts as a “looking glass” and is utilized by various members of the network to allow the students to understand the concept that attending college will be a benefit to their future career and life chances. Thus, future goal attainment involves accomplishing certain tasks in the participant’s current state in order to reap the future rewards. Cole echoed this well:

My grandmother, she tells me the requirements I have to meet to get accepted into a school and the requirements I would need to get a scholarship to the school. And my godmother, she shows me the programs I can get into to help me get to what I want to become. She shows me how it can benefit you after you go through all the sweat and tears that everybody takes.

Participant nine also describes the importance her parental figures placed on accomplishing various precollege related tasks because of the impact these will have on future college plans.

From when you were born they [parents] tried to discipline you to speak. Your parents disciplined you to sit up straight, not fall asleep in class, not talk when the

teacher is talking cause then in the long run you will remember this. Oh, I got to sit up straight when I'm talking, have a loud voice. Oh, he's talking I got to stop talking, I guess it shows respect and I forgot the word.

The four cognitive behavioral characteristics (encouragement, cautionary warnings, repetition and future goal attainment) of the village network together support precollege preparation, by affecting self-esteem and self concept, illuminating warning signs, reminding the students of the importance of staying focused by having a college-bound mind; and lastly, by allowing the students a glimpse into their desired future state. Therefore, cognitively, the participants are encouraged to think in more complex terms about precollege preparation and behaviorally to produce action that the village hopes will culminate in successful college enrollment and graduation.

Academic Involvement and Conditioning

In addition to early college discourse and cognitive-behavioral attributes, the village network also supports precollege preparation through academic involvement and preparation. The data revealed that the methods that were utilized by the village to prepare the participants were highly academic in nature. Accordingly, various members of each participant's network used various techniques to prepare students according to required needs. The types of salient academic involvement were discussions about scholarships, assistance with homework, class schedule, and grade maintenance, talking to school officials, talking to community members (friends, other parents), attending events such as sports activities, visiting college campuses, exposure to college-related literature and materials, attending a precollege program, and finally, explaining the importance of college (see Table 9).

Table 9. Frequency of Involvement Reported by Participants

Categories of Involvement	Number of Participants
Scholarship Information	12
Homework and Grades	12
Talk to School Officials	12
Talk to the Community	12
Importance of college	12
Attend Events	5
College-Related Resources	5
Precollege Programs	2
College Campus Visit	1

Scholarship information. All 12 participants discussed how involved their parental figures were in providing resources or having discussions regarding scholarships. In some cases students were encouraged to utilize the internet to find information regarding scholarship, and in all cases obtaining a scholarship was very important in terms of attending college. Scholarships and their impact on college preparation is be a theme that will be discussed in further detail in research Question 3 as

it relates to sports and economic capital. This quote from Max reflects how scholarships are important to precollege preparation.

Interviewer: If you are making a decision about what is going on in school, e.g., what courses to take, and different courses and things like that, would you say your mom and godparents are involved in that process?

Participant: Yes

Interviewer: How?

Participant: Encouraging me to look for scholarships online

In addition to securing scholarships was the importance of assistance with homework, class scheduling, and monitoring of grades.

Homework and grades. For the 12 participants in this study, constant reminders to do homework, get good grades, and assistance with scheduling classes were all a part of the cadre of academic tools that their social networks adopted in helping them along the pipeline to college. This was seen as important for the students because it kept them focused on their academic work and in some cases where their grades were low, these constant reminders and assistance was a reminder for them to improve their academic performance. The following excerpt from Cole regarding his grades and his grandmother's reactions helps to clarify this point.

Interviewer: How does grandma do this?

Participant: She make sure I do my homework at night. Make sure I do my homework. Like if a progress report come up she be like you know you can do better. Like stuff like that.

Supplementing the search for scholarships and assistance with homework, class scheduling and grades is the role of school counselors in helping some of these

participants prepare for college. The upcoming discussion provides an example of this type of academic involvement and conditioning.

Talk to school officials. Frequent contact with various school officials were reported by all 12 participants in terms of how they prepare for college. Many of the participants mentioned teachers, counselors and coaches as members of the school community that were utilized to obtain information about college. Teachers were often used by the parental figures to directly discuss in-class activities and types of courses to take. Counselors, on the other hand, were seen as information channels for college information and deadlines. Coaches were a source of discussion about college as well as ways of securing scholarships. According to Slade, “my mama get the counselor to talk to me a lot about college.” For Slade, the counselor at his school assisted and provided for him the necessary information needed to navigate between his parent’s recommendations and what is required to get into college. Similar to utilizing resources within the school environment, all the participants reported communicating with individuals in the community about college preparation. The subsequent discussion is an example of how talking to the community reinforces the importance of college.

Talk to the community. Talking to the community in this case involved discussions with individuals at the church, friends and other parents regarding college preparation. In promoting precollege preparation, actors in the village network utilize each other as resources in terms of accessing college information. For some of the participants this includes their parental figures talking to other parents at church or talking to their friends about preparing for college. This was an important method utilized

because all 12 participants mentioned that parental involvement in precollege preparation involved either them or their parental figures talking to others in the community. Skye explained:

Interviewer: You said right now the church is helping you. How would you say right now that the church is helping you in this process?

Participants: They just like encourage me to keep going even if I made a bad grade or made a wrong decision it's like it's ok. Keep going cause this is going to happen in life you can't just stop. You gotta try to push yourself even if nobody else pushes you.

Building on the support given by the community is the role of parental figures in attending various events at school. Despite having so many participants involved in extracurricular activities, only a few mentioned that their parental figures attended events at school.

Attend events. Five of the participants reported that parental involvement included their parental figures attending either a sports activity or other extra-curricular activities. Most of the participants in this study are involved in some form of extracurricular activity but only five mentioned attendance at extracurricular activities in connection with school or precollege involvement. For two of the five participants, attendance at sports activities provided an arena where their parental figures could discuss sports scholarship for college and for other parents to encourage them to stay focused in school. An example of this is when Parker discussed how his mother was involved in football games and the parent teachers association. The discussion then moved to the role of his father in extracurricular activities. The interviewer asked:

Interviewer: What about your dad?

Parker: He comes. He's a part of our football games and he talks to our teachers sometimes.

Although, five of the twelve participants reported that their parental figures attend events at their high school, only one participant reported visiting a college campus as part of preparation for college. I now discuss this finding.

College campus visits. Interestingly, only one participant mentioned visiting a college campus as a way of college preparation. However, a few of the students mentioned that visiting a college campus would be something that they would like to do in order to get an understanding of what a college campus is like. According to Cole:

My mother last year took me to my brother's freshman orientation and we stayed the night there. She let me go to the college and see the various activities and programs I can get into.

The fact that only one participant mentioned visiting a college campus is an area that needs further exploration and such an exploration will be attempted in the implications section of this study. Despite, the lack of campus visits about half of the participants reported being exposed to other resources which helped them further their knowledge and preparation about college.

College related resource. The category of college-related resources includes any book, movie or other material that parental figures had used in helping to prepare the participants for college. Five participants mentioned books and movies as ways that their parental figures used to underscore the importance of college attendance. Two of the participants mentioned that they were given books and upon further examination the

books had socially conscious themes regarding self concept, decision making, race, and culture. In addition to the book *The Gun* mentioned above, another participant stated that his parental figure gave him *A Raisin in the Sun* to read, another book that deals with issues of race. Two other participants mentioned that they were given college preparation books, more specifically, books that provided help with the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). In terms of a movie, a participant mentioned going with her family to watch the movie *The Great Debaters*, a story about a Black college debate team. Overall, college-related resources supported college preparation by giving the students exposure to various issues that affect college enrollment. James explains:

James: My aunt gives me books all the time to read . . . and she would ask me questions about it. Or, I gotta tell her what happened and stuff like that. Oh it's like the Gun, books like that.

Interviewer: The Gun? That's the title of the book?

James: Yes

Interviewer: What's that about?

James: It's about this boy and he was growing up in the projects and he really didn't have a lot. And he had a decision to make about whether he wanted to be a good guy or a bad guy. Like he had started selling drugs and stuff. And he had to rather put down the gun or go to school.

College related resources such as books and movies were important to precollege preparation and the participants who reported this type of preparation clearly understood how these resources supplemented their understanding of self, college attendance and preparation. Similar to college related resources is the role of precollege programs.

Precollege programs. Two of the 12 participants mentioned going to a local precollege program in the area. Of the two participants only one was really able to see the connection between the precollege program and college attendance. For her, going to this

program was important because it gave her an early start because she felt that historically Black students did not have the advantages that their White counterparts had. According to her, “we are trying to pull our generation up to speed and stuff.” In both cases, the participants reported that their mothers were the ones that got them involved in the program. The following statement from Skye clarifies how she became involved in a local precollege program.

Skye: They (precollege program), I think when we were in middle school they used to advertise around school go to _____ it will help you. It’s actually for Blacks, particularly Black children, kids.

Interviewer: Black students?

Skye: Yeah cause they said that there’s not enough of us that go to college or make it there . . .

Issues related to precollege programs will be discussed in the implications section of this study. Lastly, underlying the myriad of ways in which parental involvement supports precollege preparation was the role of the village network in promoting the importance of college. I will now discuss how this was done.

Importance of college. Consistently reaffirming the importance of college was another major method that emerged as it relates to precollege preparation and African American students. All 12 participants made numerous references to how actors in villages continuously reminded them of the importance of college to their future. The quote from Max highlights how the village engages in communicating the importance of college.

Interviewer: What has been the most helpful thing that your parental figures have said or done regarding college? Can I have some examples if you don’t mind?

Max: Hmm, tell me what college is for me, what doors it can open up for me, tell me about the advantages of going to college.

This method of parental involvement will be discussed in more detail in research Question 3 because it lays the foundation of the meanings that students attribute to parental involvement. The importance of college can be linked to issues of economics, social mobility and independence. The importance of college was an area in which issues of obligations, expectations and trustworthiness of the participants' social structure (Coleman, 1988) was utilized as a source of social capital.

Summary: Research Question Two

The data suggest that the characteristics and roles of parental figures, institutional affiliation, as well as early college discourse, cognitive-behavioral determinants and academic involvement and conditioning are central ways in which African American parental involvement supports precollege preparation. The rich data that was gained from these participants sheds new light on the extant literature regarding variables that can be explored further to understand the complex nature of how many of these participants are preparing for college. As purported earlier in this study, whenever there is a discussion about the achievement gap of African American students the discussion usually involves a deficit perspective. This study is suggesting another lens in which to look at educational outcomes in particular the supportive ways that African American parental networks are supporting their students in obtaining a college education.

Most importantly, kinship and non kinship networks as well as institutional affiliation used the tools that were available to them, for example using the long tradition

of the storytelling to illuminate cognitive-behavioral determinants such as encouragement. This makes the case that even though some minority communities might not have an abundance of human or physical capital, social capital in the form of encouragement is considered capital because one does not need a college education to encourage someone else to go to college. Likewise, in terms of academic involvement and conditioning, if an actor in the network lacks the skills and knowledge regarding a particular component about college, then he or she is able to communicate with members in the community, such as people at church, parents at a football game, in order to gain access to information. These three themes (early college discourse, cognitive-behavioral determinants, and academic involvement and conditioning) support Coleman's (1988) conceptualization of social capital in that early college discourse helps to build obligations and expectation, cognitive-behavioral attributes help to solidify norms and sanctions, and academic involvement and conditioning provides a source of information channels. Overall, these networks provide a sense of intergenerational closure (Coleman, 1988) which is defined by the closure of relationships in the network.

Lastly, the characteristics and roles of parental figures, institutional affiliation, early college discourse, cognitive-behavioral determinants, and academic involvement and conditioning are foundational to understanding the meanings that these participants attribute to parental involvement. These meanings will be discussed in Research Question Three.

Research Question Three: What Meanings Do African American Students and Their Parental Figures Attribute to Precollege Preparation, College Attendance, and College Completion?

Research Question Three is concerned with the meanings that the participants and their parental figures attribute to precollege preparation, attendance, and completion. Findings from Research Questions One and Two already have established that parental involvement for these African American students can be redefined into a new term—village network. Village network captures more aptly the various relationships and social actors that assist in precollege preparation. As such, the village network includes the family/community, church, school and extracurricular activities. These networks work in numerous and complex ways to prepare the student for college, as shown in Research Question Two. After examining the data from the interviews and Focus Group, three themes emerged regarding the meanings that the participants attributed to village involvement. These meanings are economic self sufficiency, societal and cultural consciousness, and the role of institutional forces. Figure 6 is a visual representation of the meanings given to village involvement.

Economic Self Sufficiency

Economic self sufficiency was a salient meaning attributed to parental involvement by the participants in this study. In the case of this study, economic self sufficiency can be defined as the ways in which the study participants understood their current and future economic and financial stability and viability (see Figure 7).

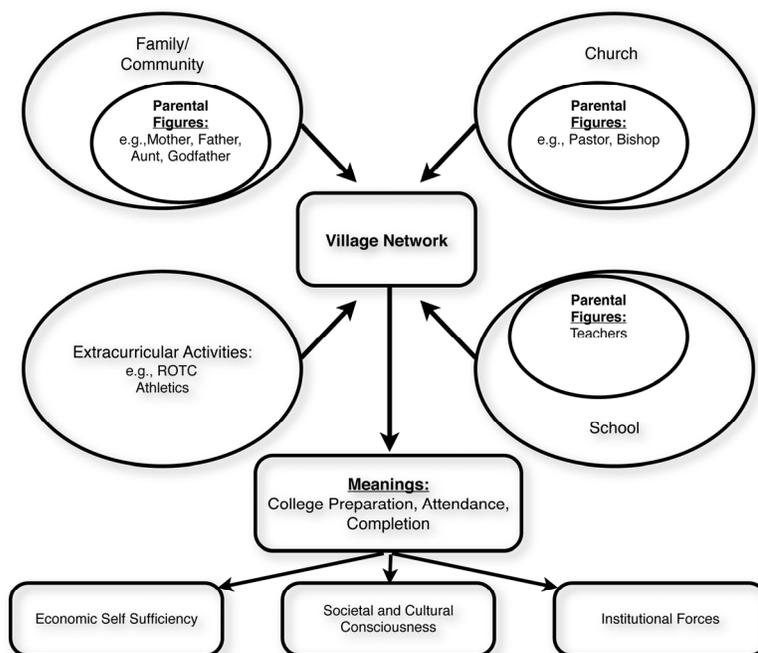


Figure 6. *Village Network of Students: Meanings*

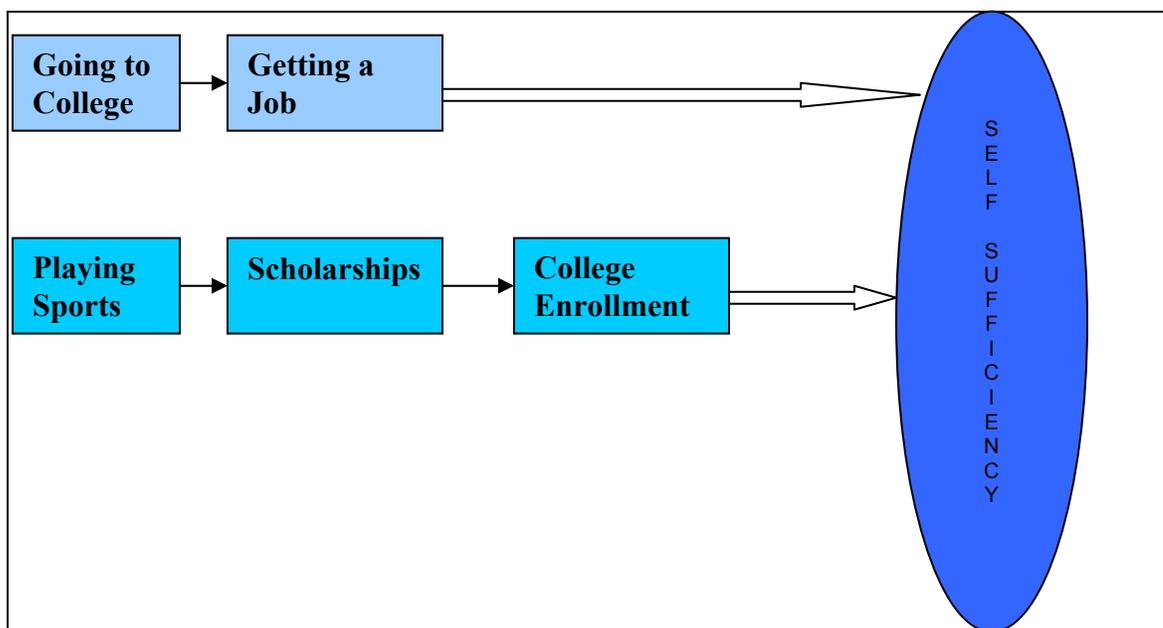


Figure 7. *Meanings Given to Self-Sufficiency*

As stated in the methodology section of this study, the majority of the students belong to working- and middle-class families. Therefore, issues of socioeconomic status, in terms of paying for college emerged frequently in the interviews. However, in the case of this study, issues of socioeconomic status emerged in an interesting manner. In the first case, all 12 participants reported that their parental figures placed an emphasis on their getting a scholarship in order to pay for college. When the emphasis on scholarships was unpacked further, the data revealed that over 75%, which is nine of 12 participants, were involved in extracurricular activities at school. The major extracurricular activities were athletics and ROTC. Although, only one participant was involved in ROTC, he saw this involvement as a vehicle to obtain a scholarship to college in the same manner that the other eight envisioned their involvement in athletics. As a result, ROTC was categorized under the theme of extracurricular activity because the participant attached an economic meaning to this type of activity as means of paying for college. A second manner in which socioeconomic status emerged in the data analysis revolved around the purpose of attending college. In this case, all the participants formally and informally mentioned that the purpose of the college was to get a job. In combination, this triumvirate model of scholarships, extracurricular activities, and jobs produced the meaning that economic self sufficiency was crucial to obtaining access to college and securing an economically viable future. This statement from Max combines the central elements of self sufficiency—scholarships, and getting a job. He explained:

Interviewer: What do you think they [parental figures] placed the most emphasis on?

Max: Scholarships.

Interviewer: Scholarships? Why do you think that is?

Max: Because most colleges now with students that come out of college have a great bit of debt on them when they come out.

Interviewer: So you think your parental figures placed an emphasis on scholarships because they don't want you to have a debt when they finish?

Max: And they want me to go into school so I can prosper and start my own business.

Playing sports. The role of sports in precollege preparation was a surprising finding of this study. Of the 12 participants, eight reported playing a specific sport in high school and one reported being involved in ROTC. The crucial connector for these students, whether involved in sports, ROTC, or not having any involvement in any of the two, was that extracurricular activities were an avenue for securing a scholarship. For many of the students the central reason they played sports was because if they receive an athletic scholarship then their parental figures did not have to pay for college. In terms of one student who participated in ROTC, he applied the same reasoning to this involvement because ROTC involvement was seen as a mechanics in addition to academics paying for college. In both cases this meant attending college would be free of cost to the village.

Table 10. *Participants Involved in Extracurricular Activities*

Extracurricular Activities	Number of Participants
Sports	8
No Involvement	3
ROTC	1

Playing sports or being involved in other extracurricular activities was seen as a vehicle to economic sufficiency. Many of the students reflected that by playing sports their parental figures did not have to pay for college. Of importance for the three students who were not involved in sports or ROTC, they also stated that their parental figures placed an emphasis on any type of scholarship as a way of gaining access to college.

Jackson asserted:

Jackson: Mainly, my parents put a lot of emphasis on academics like an academic scholarship or a sports scholarship to try to get into college.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Jackson: I think basically because you have a better chance of getting in with scholarships and it's less money on them so I guess that's why they put that kind of emphasis on it.

John when discussing ways that he and his parental figure discussed paying for college stated that they mostly talked about scholarships. He said:

John: Mostly scholarships

Interviewer: Mostly scholarships? Why do you think that is?

John: Probably because we can't afford to just pay for me to go.

James also shares similar sentiment in terms of playing sports and his parental figure's ability to pay for college. He avers:

Interviewer: Discuss if your parental figures have placed any emphasis on different ways to get into college such as through sports, academics, or scholarships? Have they placed any emphasis on these ways to get into college?

James: Yeah through basketball

Interviewer: So you are saying they placed emphasis on sports?

James: Yes sports, sports scholarships.

Interviewer: Why sports scholarships?

James: Because I can go to college for free and also play basketball.

The meaning of economic self sufficiency was also attributed to parental involvement in terms of the overall emphasis on scholarship as it relates to grades. In this case, the participants saw sports as a catalyst to attend college even if their grades were low. As a consequence, a few of the participants were over reliant on getting a scholarship through sports and revealed that they were not producing to their full academic potential because getting a scholarship via sports was their main priority. The following quotations underscore the meanings attributed to the conflict between grades and sports.

1. Scholarships, scholarships, some of them (students) don't have good enough grades to get a scholarship so they play sports. (Asher)
2. Like either you got good grades and can play sports that's how most people get into college. (Parker)
3. I think a lot of Black students at my school see it more as sports are going to get me in and grades are going to be extra. Instead of grades get me in and the sports is the extra kick. (Jackson)

Considering the previous paragraph, the data also uncovered an interesting dichotomy in regards to some of the participants correlating playing sports with receiving a scholarship. In discussing with the participants whether there was too much emphasis on sports as a way for Black students to enter college, some of them surprisingly revealed that they were not performing fully academically because they knew that if they played sports then most likely they will get a scholarship for college. One participant, in discussing his dedication to playing sports at the detriment of his grades, cautioned this interviewer "Don't tell my mom I said that" referring to a statement that he could do

better academically if he focused. Another participant also had an interesting perspective on athletic involvement and how this affects academics. He explained that there is nothing wrong with relying on a sports scholarship as a way to get into college because a sports scholarship will “let somebody see their dream.”

Hence, whether the students were involved in extracurricular sports or ROTC, a scholarship was equated with a free education therefore lessening the burden for parental figures. Of the three students who were not involved in sports, Asher stated that his parental figure, although he did not play sports, was adamant about him receiving a sports scholarship. He avers:

Interviewer: Alright, let’s consider what they have told you about college. Have they placed any emphasis on different ways to get into college, such as through sports, academics, or scholarships?

Asher: Hmm, my mother. Through sports

Interviewer: Through sports?

Asher: Just sports

Interviewer: Why do you think she has placed an emphasis on sports?

Asher: Because she has seen a lot of kids get into college because of sports

Interviewer: Okay

Asher: And she wants me to do that. She just says sports, sports,

Interviewer: Okay

Interviewer: She sees a lot of kids get into college through sports and so she thinks that is a good way for you to go?

Asher: Yes, so she doesn’t have to pay, like a scholarship. I told her you can go through education but she wants me to do sports.

Interviewer: So you think what she is saying is the idea that if you play sports you can get a scholarship and that will help financially.

Asher: Yes

Although the students reflected that without a sports or an academic scholarship they would still want to attend college, many of them are banking on paying for college through a scholarship. Despite the fact that the participants view scholarships, in

particular sports scholarship, as a vehicle toward economic self sufficiency, this has major implication on creating a balance between academics and sports. Such implications will be discussed in the implications section of this study.

The meaning of college attendance. The overall purpose for going to college was instrumental in terms of the meaning of economic self-sufficiency that was attributed to parental involvement. Formally and informally, all 12 participants stated that their primary reason for going to college was to get a job. When probed further, the students revealed that getting a job meant they would be economically independent enabling them to take care of themselves, and in some cases, their families in the future. This message was transmitted to the students by their respective social networks as a way for them to secure a future that was economically stable. Although the students had other reasons (growth and development, higher levels of education, and civic responsibilities) for attending college, getting a degree in order to get a job was mentioned more often than any other category. So, for these students, economic survivability in the future meant a college education. Interestingly, many of the students did not make any reference to graduate education. Most of them discussed a college degree in terms of an undergraduate education. The type of future the participants imagined is one that includes attaining a college degree because in the words of one participant a college degree will allow him to get a “good job.” A few of the participants had very defined career goals but further analysis revealed that these careers were means to obtaining material possessions, such as cars, clothes, and homes. Furthermore, some of the participants also mentioned community responsibilities such as providing for their families or running a group home

for fatherless boys, but overall the purpose of college was more geared toward the private good of a college education.

Table 11. *Reasons for Going to College*

Reasons for Going to College	Number of Participants
Get a Job/Money	12
Growth and Development	6
Higher level of Education	5
Community	4

The following statements from these participants clearly outline the reasons going to college in order to get a job meant a sense of economic self sufficiency.

1. Yeah, my sister said I need to go to college too. She tell me that when I was around ten years old. And she told me that I had to go to college to be successful and get a nice job. Right around the age when I start talking to girls. And she told me you can't get a girl without having education or going to college. If you want to have a girl you have to get a nice job. And the only way to get a nice job is if you go to college... get a good job. When you have a college education, you can get a better job. And it depends on what you want to do. If you want to be a pharmacist you can go to college and become a pharmacist. College has a big impact on your career. You get license to do whatever you want to do. (Asher)
2. Get nice big houses, the money you want to make, the kind of job you want to get. (Hallie)
3. Participant: I know one time we were at a foreign car dealership and we were looking at cars and all of us were talking about man you got to go to college so we can buy one of these cars one day.

Interviewer: And why do you think college will give you these things? Why do you think going to college will let you have fancy cars and clothes?

Participant: We already got the clothes we want the cars. Cause most of the people you have to have a degree and like you hear some stuff like how much people get paid so I want to go to college and study that.

Interviewer: So college for you is what, making money?

Participant: Yeah. (Parker)

4. Interviewer: Why is going to college important to you? Why do you want to go? Why is it important?

Participant: I want to go to make a lot of money really.

Interviewer: Making a lot of money? That's it? That's the bottom line? Just money?

Participant: Yeah

Interviewer: And what does making a lot of money mean for you?

Participant: That I'll have a good life.

Interviewer: What is a good life? Cars and clothes like you said?

Participant: Family, cars, houses

Interviewer: So basically, college for you is just to get a job?

Participant: A good job. (Asher)

Economic self sufficiency was a meaning that these participants attributed to parental involvement. Although these students were at different levels in terms of preparing for college, each of them was keenly aware of how their socioeconomic status affected their college enrollment. Additionally, this awareness about economical concerns is also closely related to the second meaning attributed to parental involvement—societal and cultural consciousness. These two meanings are interconnected because the participants were able to link the effects of their socioeconomic status, race, college attendance and future economic self sufficiency into a narrative that provides evidence that precollege preparation for African American students is more nuanced and that traditional models of parental involvement are not appropriate and requires reconstructing to include the variables uncovered by this study. I

will discuss the second meaning attributed parental involvement- societal and cultural consciousness.

Societal and Cultural Consciousness

The two interviews and one focus group conducted for this study uncovered that the participants on their journey to making college a reality were acutely aware of issues of self as it relates to society and culture. Societal and cultural consciousness was a meaning which these participants attributed to parental involvement based on the village's position within the wider society. Research Question 1 unearthed that together the participants had a network of 42 village members who participated in some aspect of their precollege preparation. This signifies that for many of these students messages regarding self and society was being filtered and delivered through various actors in the network, and the experiences of each individual actor. Consequently, whether the village network member was a kinship or non kinship member, or whether they were involved in early college discourse, these types of participation produced the meaning that societal and cultural consciousness was important. More specifically, the role of race and human development was central to the underlying tenets that fostered an understanding because these participants were able to filter and produce the meaning that in preparing for college there must be a consciousness regarding the self, society and culture. The following discussion underscores how the meaning of societal and cultural consciousness was developed by this participant. In this interview, Jackson was discussing how his parental figures wanted him to have the "American Dream." He explained what the American dream meant to him:

My definition of the American dream I would say is just being able to live the way you want to live without going in want of anything and not being pressured or discriminated against.

He then correlated his definition with the meaning of freedom. He states:

Jackson: I think they [biological parents] had freedom but they didn't have the American dream.

Interviewer: Why not?

Jackson: I don't know. I guess because they felt like there was something that they wouldn't be able to do, or be able to see that they never got that chance and they don't want me to go through life and not have those chances of some of those things I wanted to do.

This conversation underscores the correlation between self, society and culture, and how such meanings are communicated by the village.

Race. Issues involving race and precollege preparation were discussed from various angles by the participants. Of note, the focus group discussion, in particular, became a heated debate over the role of race, education and college attendance as it relates to the election of the first African American president. This exert from the focus group is an example of how the participants internalized and constructed a cultural and societal awareness of a college preparation and enrollment.

Interviewer: Is race an issue in terms of how African American students prepare for college. Is race still an issue?

James: Yes, not no more, Obama's president (everyone laughs, and jeers participant 3).

James: No, because it will be easier for Black people to get places (Tara, shakes her head saying oh my gosh)

James continues: Cause we have seen that a Black person can make it to President (at this point everyone in room is in an uproar)

Interviewer: Hold on. Let's be respectful and hear him out.

James: Cause we have seen that a Black person can make it to President so it will be easier for another Black student to go somewhere.

Jackson: I am number 11, (laughing) and da-gone it, I don't agree with like half the stuff he just said because I mean you can't base a whole generation or a whole race on just one person making it, and you gonna look at (someone shouts Obama is White)

Jackson: Obama is Black

James: But he didn't have a daddy like a lot a people like us

Jackson: Yeah, he missed his dad but he grew up in a family that he was being cushioned to be something great. He went to Harvard. They was knowing he was going to Harvard. What you are not looking at is that most Black kids are not having the chances and opportunities that he had. They are not going through the experiences that he has, they haven't been cushioned, they don't have the finance and stuff like that. You also got to look at, yeah, people might look at us a little different saying that maybe two Black people smart now or something like that (there are chuckles in the room) I don't think they are gonna look at saying the whole Black race done stepped up just because one person got in the presidency.

James: Yes, I do. I think so

Tara: I don't think so

Interviewer: Hold on, let (participant 3) make his point.

James: See look man, you saying, if our President is Black, Obama grew up with no dad, no money, and they lived in the hood.

Jackson: He had a mom though just like everybody else

James: Yeah and his mom supported him, your mama don't support you?

Jackson: My mama support me, too, and I got a dad

James: Alright, so if you wanted to go to Harvard you could go to Harvard right now if you wanted to (more laughing from other participants)

Interviewer: Hold on. Is James right that if you wanted to go to Harvard you could go to Harvard as well?

Jackson: Yes, he is

James: Alright, so

Jackson: Yeah, but what I am saying is that I haven't been cushioned to say I should be since going to elementary school the way Obama has been.

James: So whose fault is that?

Jackson: I wouldn't say it's nobody's fault. It's just the position it landed me in. He was landed in a position that he can go to any school he wanted to and Harvard was chosen and that makes him a very educated man. And that's why he got the presidency.

James: Oh, alright

This excerpt from the focus group was laden with many of the same issues that were discussed by the participants in both interviews. Of the ten participants present in the focus group, eight stated that race was still an issue and two felt that it was not an issue. The overwhelming message here was that the majority of the participants see race as still a barrier in college preparation. This quotation from the focus group included many of the issues that have been discussed in this study—socioeconomic status, parental involvement, family composition, the importance of early college discourse, African American achievement, college preparation and the role of the community, in what Jackson calls “cushioning” students to be successful. As the discussion regarding Barack Obama, race, and college continued, one participant stated that Barack Obama was able to reach such an academic excellence because “the Black community helped him.” Importantly, this discussion also provided a look into the issue of household configuration and transformation in the Black community that was discussed in the literature review section of this study—the discussion regarding Barack Obama having been raised by his mother and having an absentee father. This discussion highlights the role that his mother played in preparing him for college. From the discussion, Jackson and James both placed an emphasis on the role of their mothers. This was not surprising given that both participants reported that their earliest discussion about college was with their biological mothers (see Table 12).

Another example of the heightened awareness regarding race and college preparation is the role that these participants see themselves occupying in creating a new image of African American precollege preparation.

Table 12. *With Whom Participants Held First Discussion about College*

Individuals	Number of Participants
Mother	7
Teacher	2
Father	1
Football Teammates	1
Both Parents	1

During the interviews, there were many references to the importance of being seen as a responsible member of the society. Cole, in discussing this issue, outlined how his mother was very determined that he would achieve academic excellence. He said:

She tells me that I'm not going to be a part of the male statistics as being a nobody and being lazy and uneducated.

Cole was not the only participant who discussed the importance of not being a statistic. This is an important point because the research indicates that Black females outnumber Black males in institutions of higher education. This reveals that there is awareness in the village network regarding this troubling statistics and that through their preparation efforts village network members might be trying to change this statistics in their own way.

In a similar manner, Skye revealed:

Maybe saying that some people look at you because you are Black still. It's not over yet. What happened in the past is still not over with everybody. So just because you're Black they are going to expect something from you like they see music videos and they are going to expect that from you. You have to show them that that is not you and they don't represent you. You represent yourself and other African American kids.

She further stated:

Because everybody is sending out bad signals especially on radio, TV, bad music, all the music videos, anything. They are trying to put Black people on there and I'm like that is not us at all. But White people see them . . . they nice. You see them on posters they look all nice. But if you see a poster of Black people they have to have a grill in their mouth and looking crazy and stuff. I'm like that's not how we really live. You see a White person with a book in their hands. We have books all the time. We have book bags and everything. That's why I want them to know we think just like them. We are not slow. We're not crazy or disrespectful. Some of us are but so is White people and Asians. Everybody is human here. Nobody is different.

Issues regarding race were significant in terms of the meaning that the students attributed to parental involvement. Whether it was from the macro perspective of the election of the first Black President, or the micro perspective of talking responsibility for one's image and expectations, these participants were painfully aware that elements of college preparation includes race, prejudice, and discrimination.

Human development. For these participants, college enrollment meant that they would be embarking on another stage in their development. College was seen as another level where the participants would learn many things such as: "how to become a man," "learning about other people," "independence and freedom," "maturity," and "acquiring a higher level of learning." The concept that students undergo certain developmental milestones in college is well researched in the literature. Theorists such as Chickering and

Reissner (1993), Perry (1991), and Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) have all forwarded different models of college development. This finding from this study corroborates some of the underlying tenets of these theories and gives some support to the idea that there are certain experiences that are common among college students. Although the participants had great aspirations for the “changes” that will take place in college, some of them were not sure how they would develop the skills needed for such developments but seemed somewhat sure they would be changed as human beings when they left college. A few participants stated:

1. Going to college is more experiences, more people, on your own, a time to get up. College is good for me because I wanna go to expand and grow up even more. (Hallie)
2. It will help me mature more and it will focus me more. I will get more reality of the real world. (Cole)
3. Independence, more work, one step closer to becoming a man and responsibility. I think that is it. Well independence, you are judged at like you can have more freedom than home, you don't have your mother telling you what to do, when to do, and responsibility is like all of your friends are talking about going to a big party and you know you have to study that night for the big exam in the morning. (Cole)

The anticipation about what changes would take place in college and the environment invoked some fears and questions in the participants. For example, anticipations about having independence and freedom produce concern regarding time management in college. Jackson considers:

Like what is the hourly system? I would ask questions about college set up like if you play sports when you go to class one time a day what do you do in between or

what's the starting guidelines and stuff? And then I would also ask maybe what's the set up for college and I guess that's it.

Also issues of maturity and gaining a higher education in conjunction with independence led to Hallie pondering how these changes will affect her experience in college. She expresses:

Moving out of the house, getting a car, pay rent, just working, it's kinda what do I do going to college on my own, how would I handle it. It's not really like a big deal right now but as it gets closer and closer it's probably gonna get tight. Those are the things that kind of like worry me. . . . Hmm, living in dorm, the way, (sigh) just classes, the average college. I wonder, hmm, if it will continue to be something that you will look forward to.

An awareness regarding human development was embedded in the societal and cultural consciousness that these students attributed to parental involvement. On one hand, the participants exhibited anticipation for college attendance based on how these changes will affect them as individuals, while on the other these same anticipations produced questions and fears (hesitations) regarding how they will handle these new changes. Figure 8 displays types of anticipations and hesitations forward by the students.

Institutional Forces

The role of institutional forces is another meaning that was attributed to parental involvement. Institutional forces included the college application process, in particular, differential access and the role of stereotyping; and the role of media and college. The institutional forces were areas in which the participants felt impacted how they would be perceived as serious college candidates.

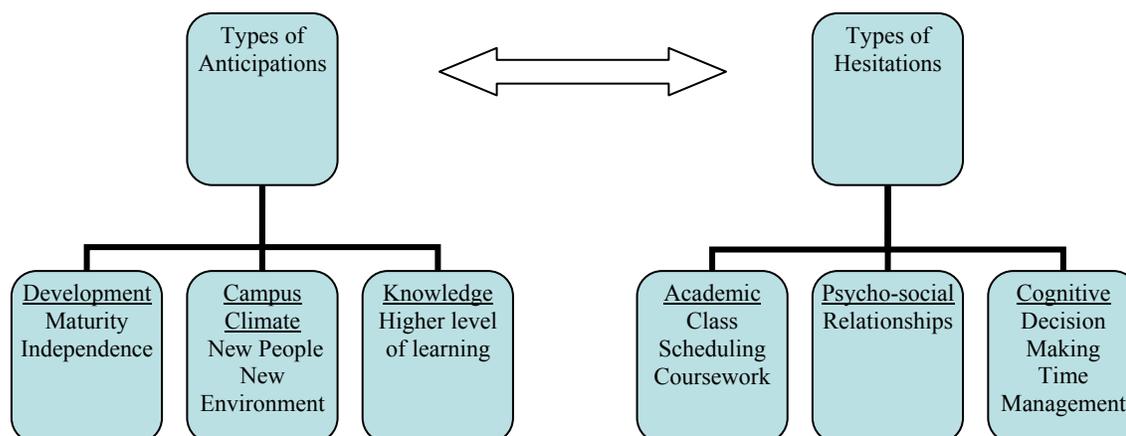


Figure 8. *The Role of Human Development*

College application process. In preparing for college many of the participants were divided on whether the preparation process was different for Black and White students. Some participants felt there were no differences in how students prepare for college because “everyone prepares the same,” whereas a few felt that there was a difference, in particular, in terms of economics or access to resources for college. Max stated:

Well, White folks have a, well they think, it is a lot easier for them to get into colleges while the Black parents have to scour around looking for different things, search around for different programs to get their children into college cause it’s hard enough for them.

So although the majority of the participant felt the precollege preparation was the same across racial lines, the sentiment was very different when discussing the actual application process. The participants felt that, although they might have been prepared by the village, once their college application is submitted they would be judged differently

by college admission officers. This, they feel, is due to differential access. This is how

Tara describes it:

Tara: Because some colleges I can't say they don't accept Black students but there are some colleges that's like . . . you have to look at the colleges that you are eligible to go to.

Interviewer: So what do you mean? Explain eligible to go to.

Tara: You have the predominately White colleges and you have the Black historical colleges so if you wanted to go to the White colleges it's going to be hard.

Interviewer: Why?

Tara: Cause it's not like, the White colleges are, they're different.

Interviewer: Can you explain what makes them so different?

Tara: Cause they are like the majority are White people and so you got a different atmosphere than you are used to you have to adapt.

Interviewer: What does that mean for you if you chose to go to a predominately White college? What would that adaptation be like?

Tara: It would be easy for me because I went to a predominately White high school.

In this case Tara talks about the difference in types of colleges and the kinds of environment that a student must consider when applying to particular colleges. She further stated that she was interested in going to a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) because they were better equipped to deal with issues related to Black students and also that they understood the financial issues facing Black families.

James felt that the application process would be affected by the college background of his parental figures and family composition. He posits:

James: Cause I know people will look at me and be like he's Black. Cause my mama didn't go to a college she went to a beauty college. All his parents didn't go to college. My daddy didn't go to college. All his parents didn't go to college. They will judge me without really knowing me. Oh look at the way he dress, he's not fit to go to this college.

Interviewer: So you are saying the idea of your parents having not gone to college and maybe how you walk or dress really affects how you prepare for college?

James: Yeah it doesn't affect me personally but I know it's going to be there when I start applying and stuff.

In addition, stereotyping by others in society, in particular, higher education institutions, was another factor that the participants felt affected the college application process. Over 70% of the participants mentioned stereotyping in terms of its effect on college attendance and preparation. The overall message regarding stereotyping and the larger society was best captured by Max:

That not to believe the stereotypes they put out about us or anything else. Stereotypes such as every Black person speak Ebonics. I'm sitting here right now and I haven't said a single word that even comes close to speaking Ebonics. And that all Black people like rap. I don't like rap, I like rock. There are actually some of us who want to get somewhere in life. They want to do more than just play around and party all the time. That's not all Blacks.

For some of the participants stereotyping in terms of how Black students are perceived was another factor that affected actual college enrollment. Asher states:

Interviewer: Does being an African American student affect how you prepare for college?

Asher: Yes,

Interviewer: How?

Asher: Some colleges wouldn't want to accept you, you know

Interviewer: Some colleges wouldn't want to accept you. Why?

Asher: It will be harder for you to get into college being African American.

Interviewer: Why

Asher: Like you know college is a lot of white kids, I just think that white kids is just easier to get into college

Interviewer: What do you think makes it so easy for them to get into college?

Asher: Hmm, their roots. I am not sure it's just always been like that

Interviewer: Their roots?

Asher: America is a racist place, a real racist place and the majority of white people it is easier to get in than a Black person can.

Interviewer: So you don't think that if a Black and White student does an equal amount of work and they apply to the same university, who do you think gets in?

Asher: Both of them get in, but if they had to choose the white person would get in.

Interviewer: Why?

Asher: Because they put stereotypes on Black students

Interviewer: What kind of stereotypes?

Asher: Like they are ghetto, or something they automatically put a stereotype.

Media and college. The role of the media and the participants' perception of college were also factors that contributed to the role of institutional forces being a meaning attributed to parental involvement. Due to the number of participants who were involved in sports, some of the messages they internalized about college was directly equated to the media and sports. So, whereas some students would reveal that the media represented college as a place for fun and parties, these same participants had to reconcile these messages with what was being told to them by members of their social networks. As a result, some the participants were faced with dual images about college—one from the media and another image from their parental figures. For those students who had competing images, most of them shared that the message that their parental figures forwarded about college was what they believed. According to James:

Media make it seem like college is easy but parents say you really have to work to get what you want in college.

Asher shares similar sentiments:

They are the same but separate in a way, cause college on TV just look like fun. My parental figures don't tell me that college is fun all they tell me make sure you do your stuff, make sure you do good. Just do good college.

The above sentiments shared by the participants indicate that as an institution the media plays a powerful role in how the participants view the college process. For those participants who were involved in sports, the media was one of their main outlets in terms of the messages regarding sports and college entrance. With the students receiving some supporting and conflicting images from their parental figure, they developed a sharp understanding that institutional forces also play a role in how they prepared for college.

Summary: Research Question Three

Overall, the meanings that these participants attributed to precollege preparation, college attendance, and college completion included a deep awareness of the need to be economically self sufficient, a heightened sense of societal and cultural consciousness, as well as the role of institutional forces in the college process. These meanings were derived directly from the interaction between the participants and the members of their village network. Together, these meanings provide a worldview that allows the participants to see how self, society and culture combine to produce meanings, resources and access to various types of capital. This study provides support that the social networks which these students are members of, produce social capital in the form of relationships that aid in college preparation. These relationships stretch beyond biological ties, with an emphasis on early college discourse, as well as certain cognitive behavioral attributes, and a focus on academic preparation and conditioning to produce meanings relevant to these participants. As result of social capital in the form of norms and

sanctions, information channels, as well as obligations and expectations (Coleman, 1988) these participants appear to have an understanding of the barriers in their networks, such as financial and cultural, that affect college attendance and participation. I assert that the data provide some evidence that having networks that produce social capital allows for an understanding of other types of capital such as human, physical, and cultural capital. Implications of these finding will be the focus of the final chapter of this study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter will review the purpose of the study, research methodology, and summary of findings. This will be followed by a discussion, implications for policy and practice as well as recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

The purpose of this study was to construct a model of parental involvement that would be more appropriate for African American students and their families. This study's contention is that previous definitions and studies regarding parental involvement were not robust enough to account for the multifarious composition of some African American families. Accordingly, the theory of social capital was utilized as a framework to understand the role of parental involvement in the precollege preparation of African American students. Social capital, in particular Coleman's (1988) conceptualization of the theory allowed for a reconstruction of the term parental involvement to that of *village network* to encapsulate the capital present in the social networks of the 12 participants in this study.

In order to answer the research questions a qualitative instrumental case study was conducted with 12 African American high school students, nine were males, and three females. These participants were selected from two local churches (Gospel Truth and Amazing Faith) in the southeastern United States. Combined, the 12 participants

represented eight different high schools in the surrounding area, seven were public institutions, and one was a home school. Study participants were purposely selected on the basis of: race, enrollment in grades 10, 11 or 12, and had a plan of going to a two-year community college or a four-year college or university. Data was gathered via two semi-structured interviews and one focus group. After these data sources were transcribed they were analyzed to produce the findings outlined in chapter four of this study. I will now reiterate a summary of these findings.

Summary of Findings

This study propounded three research questions in order to shed light on the purpose of this study—creating a more relevant model of parental involvement especially pertaining to how African American students prepared for college. Following is a summary of these findings.

Research Question One

Whom do students see as parental figures? This research question was concerned with the individuals that the participants identified as parental figures and how these individuals were involved in parental involvement. The analysis of the data pertaining to this research question reveals that parental figures for these participants were not restricted to blood ties. In actuality, the participants specifically named individuals who were not related to them by blood ties and were clear in their reasoning why these individuals were parental figures and gave specific examples how these actors assisted in precollege preparation. Overall, the parental figures in this study were thematically partitioned into two groups - kinship and non kinship relational networks. Kinship

networks were those network members that were related to the participant by blood for example mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, and aunt. On the other hand, non kinship networks were members who were unrelated by blood such as teacher, pastor, family friend, and family aunt. As such, when examined numerically, this study started with 12 participants and after naming the members in their networks the network expanded to total of 42 members. Upon further analysis, the network became even more expansive when the networks of family/community, school, church, and extracurricular activities were included because these networks included individuals that aided in precollege preparation but were not mentioned specifically by the participants.

The findings presented in research question one are supported by extant literature (Coleman, 1988, Fordham 1988, 1986; Sanders, 1998) that examine how social networks create social capital, in particular networks that include members who have no blood ties to the network. Tierney and Venegas (2006) used the concept of fictive kin to discuss how peer groups aid in applying for college. In their discussion of peers as fictive kin networks they state “one might think of a fictive kin group as a tightly bonded group of individuals who have come together for a specific purpose” (p. 1691). Tierney and Venegas further postulate that peers can be seen as fictive kin because “fictive kin groups enable potential for the groups to think about college and to be considered as college eligible in way that other students are not” (p. 1691).

Similarly, Ebaugh and Curry (2000) in their study of how fictive kin were considered a source of social capital in immigrant communities state that “fictive kin systems expand the network of individuals who are expected to provide social and

economical capital and thereby constitute a resource available to immigrants as they confront the problems of incorporation in a new and strange society” (p. 191). According to Ebaugh and Curry (2000), African American communities in the United States have been examples of communities with a fictive kin model where networks were expanded to include individuals referred to as “aunt or uncle” (p. 194). Tierney and Venegas (2006) and Ebaugh and Curry’s (2000) studies provide support for the research findings of this study because these African American students were from networks of kinship and non kinship relationships. In these networks, the creation of social capital was strengthened because of the access to other actors that encourage norms and sanctions, obligations and expectations, and functioned as sources of information channels (Coleman, 1988).

Research Question Two

What are the ways in which African American parental involvement supports precollege preparation from a student perspective? From the perspective of the participants there were many ways in which African American parental involvement supported precollege preparation. Parental figures were network members that by virtue of their role in precollege preparation and how they interacted with the participants were categorized into three groups—the Maslowian supporter, the life coach and teacher, and the village encourager and pusher. The Maslowian supporters were individuals who reflected Maslow’s Theory of Hierarchy of Needs in particular the need to have shelter, food and love. The life coach and teacher were those network members whose role was to teach and guide the participants on life choices and consequences. Likewise, the village

encourager and pusher were those actors who represented a source of encouragement for the participant to expand beyond the village to attain educational excellence.

In addition, based on the narratives provided by the students particular institutional affiliations emerged as a part of the broader village network. The family/community network was one component of the network that included family and the community. This aspect of the network especially that of the family was instrumental in conveying information to other areas of the village. Furthermore, the home was an area of the network that displayed Coleman's (1988) concept of intergenerational closure in that there was communication between the participants, their friends, and their parental figures regarding college. This helped to establish norms in terms of college attendance, as well as the expectation that college was an option. The network of the church was another section of the network that was elementary to college preparation.

The church network included either a pastor or church members who depending on the participant were actively engaged in facets of precollege preparation. Consequently, the church's role in precollege preparation was dualistic- on one hand the church functioned as a pathway to spiritual engagement and uplift; and on the other hand as a conduit for information about college, as well as establishing expectation for college persistence. The last two networks that of the school and extracurricular activities work together to provide the participants as well as other actors in the network with access to information from teachers, counselors and coaches. More specifically, over 75% of the participants were involved in extracurricular activities that were directly related to the schools in which they attend. Thus, as members of these networks the participants

reported a plethora of ways in which individually or aggregately network members work to support precollege preparation. The types of support provided were in the form of early college discourse, cognitive-behavioral determinants, and academic involvement and conditioning.

The participants reflected that early college discourse was one way in which the network supported precollege preparation. The majority of the participants reported that discussions regarding college began during middle school with an emphasis on the role of academics in preparing for college. The data analysis also indicated that certain cognitive-behavioral attributes such as encouragement, cautionary warnings, repetition, and future goal attainment acted synergistically to create and foster an environment that promoted the importance of college enrollment. Lastly, academic preparation and conditioning also supported precollege preparation for these 12 African American students. Examples of types of academic preparation and conditioning included providing scholarship information, helping with homework and encouragement to maintain grades, communicating with school officials and others in the community, attending events, visiting college campus, providing college related resources, and underscoring the importance of college.

Concomitantly, the village network (family/community, church, school, extracurricular activities) and the ways (early college discourse, cognitive-behavioral determinants, and academic involvement and conditioning) in which they support precollege preparation of African American students illuminate that a social capital conceptual framework is a legitimate conceptual frame to examine African American

students' precollege preparation. Social capital theory in particular Coleman's (1988) conceptualization examines how aspects of social relations create capital in order to accomplish a particular action on the part of network members. Additionally, the findings from research question two proffer a counter narrative to that of the dominant discourse that is too often invested in cultural deficits models that blame the African American communities for educational under achievement without considering the institutional and structural barriers in the society that inhibits involvement . These participants present a counter discourse that questions traditional definitions of parental involvement and furthermore findings of this research question suggest some congruency with other research on African American college preparation and enrollment.

In a complimentary study, Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) posit that "the literature shows that parental encouragement matters for lowest SES students' postsecondary plans" (p. 136). Encouragement was one component of the cognitive-behavioral attributes that the participants reported supported their precollege preparation. This finding from research questions two supports the extant literature because as stated before the students in this study were mostly from working to middle class families the same as the participants in the Cabrera and La Nasa study.

In terms of the significant role that the church played in the college preparation of these participants, Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) state that socio-culturally the Black church as an institution is vital part of the Black community. Brown and Gary (1991) in their study of religious socialization and educational attainment underscore that religious affiliation was positively associated with educational attainment. Additionally, in

highlighting the nexus between the types of networks mentioned in this study (family/community, school, church, extracurricular activities) Sanders' (1998) study on the effects of school, family, and community on educational achievement reveals that "by providing encouragement and guidance, significant adults in the family, church, and school help students to develop the attitude and behaviors necessary for school success" (p. 401). These findings from relevant research literature helps to bolster the themes that emerged in answering research question two. These themes displayed that members of the participants' networks utilized the tools that were available in those networks to produce a combined effect—linking the importance of college preparation with successful college enrollment. Thereby, helping the participants to see the role their village networks have in moving college from an aspiration to a realization.

Research Question Three

What meanings do African American students and their parental figures attribute to precollege preparation, college attendance, and college completion? As a result of whom the students recognized as parental figures and the ways in which these figures supported precollege preparation created various meanings for the participants. These meanings involved an awareness of economic self sufficiency, societal and cultural consciousness, and the role of institutional forces.

Economic self sufficiency involved an awareness of the cost of college as well as employment after college. All of the participants in this study stated that they hope to attend college by receiving a scholarship which will relieve the financial burden on their parental figures in particular biological parents. This push to attain a scholarship was

even more fervent for the nine participants who were involved in extracurricular activities such as athletics or ROTC. For these participants and their parental figures playing sports was a means of economic capital in that a sports scholarship would gain them access to college. This tremendous investment in sports as means to enroll in college appears to have conflicted with grade maintenance since grades appear to take a secondary role for some of the students in terms of ways to get a scholarship.

Another finding relevant to economic self sufficiency was the overwhelming emphasis on college as a catalyst for getting a job. Although, the students had other reasons for attending college formal and informal references to getting a job after college was reported more frequently by the participants.

The second meaning that was attributed to parental involvement by the participants was that of societal and cultural consciousness. The participants were very aware of issues of race and human development and their effects on college preparation. Their awareness of race involved the role of racism in American society and how this filters into how one prepares for college. Discussions about race included references to sports and the schools they attended. Overall, the data suggest that the participants do not believe that they are living in a post-racial America because being an African American is still a barrier in terms of access to resources.

On the other hand, societal and cultural consciousness created anticipations and hesitations for some of the students regarding college being another stage of human development. Examples of anticipations were positive feelings that college would help them become independent, and as a few of male participant's explained "help me become

a man.” Fears or hesitations included questions about time management, and establishing relationships, and decision making.

Thirdly, the role of institutional forces was a meaning attributed to parental involvement by the participants. Institutional forces included the college application process as well as the media’s role in messages about college. For the participants, the college application process was one area where the influence of the village began to diminish because of structural and institutional barriers based on race. The participants indicated that although there were some differences in terms of how Black and White students prepare for college such as lack of resources on the part of African American students overall the majority of the participants felt that everyone prepares the same way. However, upon further analysis the participants felt that the differences in college enrollment become pronounced once they have actually applied to college. They cite that stereotyping of African Americans played a significant role in how their application would be evaluated. Consequently, these students’ perception of themselves were positive and many of them felt that the wider society needs to be aware that they want to go to college, and that the mythopoetical image of the not caring African American student needed to be revamped.

Additionally, the role of the media was a meaning that was relevant for parental involvement. Due to high numbers of participants in this study who were involved in sports and whom were hoping to attend college via sports scholarship, the role of the media was salient for the participants because of the media role in transmitting images and coded messages that were transmitted about college. Media message about college

were realistic in some cases, and in other cases created the image that college was just about having fun. This was an area of contention for some of participants in that the media portrayal of college was at times not in agreement with what their parental figures shared about college which was that college was a place for academic rigor.

Overall, the meanings that were constructed by these participants is very relevant to the literature that deals with topics such as socioeconomic status and college enrollment (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Freeman, 1997; Perna, 2000; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005), as well as the systematic and institutionalized barriers affecting African American students in the pipeline to college (Freeman, 1997, 1999; Ogbu, 1992, 1993).

In terms of the finding of economic self sufficiency, Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) state that “parental involvement in children’s school activities, as well as parental educational expectation are likely to be enhanced if lowest SES- parents see a connection between a college degree and economic and social benefits” (p. 142). This sentiment by Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) captures the participants’ perspective that going to college was equated with getting a job, and that securing financial assistance for college was central to them attending college. Based on the socioeconomic status of the members of the village, the relationship between current economic resources and future economic stability was an important element of parental involvement. Freeman’s (1997) study also uncovered some of the same findings of this study regarding the focus on economic barriers and issues for a group of African American high school students. In her study the

students were concerned as well with getting a good paying job as well as not having sufficient finances to attend college.

Another example of how the findings from research question three supports existing research literature pertains to the role of institutional forces as well as societal and cultural consciousness. Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) in their study found that involvement by parents was influenced by higher education, social, economic, and policy issues.

Discussion

Given the findings presented in chapter four as well as the summary of findings outlined in the previous paragraphs there are several overarching factors that can be drawn from all three research questions.

First, Coleman's theory of social capital (1988) was a relevant conceptual lens to examine the role of parental involvement in the precollege preparation of African American students. By no means am I suggesting that social capital is the only lens by which this colossal societal issue can be addressed; instead, the findings from this study underscore the importance of social networks, their connectivity, and how these two factors operate to transmit messages about academic achievement and college attendance for African American students and their families. In utilizing a social capital lens, the findings from this study shed light on the narrow nature of traditional theories and definitions of parental involvement, as well as the limited scope of previous studies on parental involvement and college enrollment.

Additionally, the ways in which the village network operated in terms of its reliance on expectations, obligations, and trust (such as academic preparation and conditioning), the role of information channels (such as the church and school, and parents' friends) and the role of norms and sanctions (such as cognitive-behavioral attributes, and types of anticipations and hesitations about college) suggest that social capital was active in sending the message that college enrollment was important. This is supported by Coleman (1988) in defining the function of social capital. He states,

by identifying this function of certain aspects of social structure, the concept of social capital constitutes both an aid in accounting for different outcomes at the level of individual actors and an aid toward making the micro-to macro transitions without elaborating the social structure details through which this occurs. (p. S101)

In this manner, Coleman posits that if physical and human capital can produce activity so can social capital because social networks where there is importance placed on trustworthiness tend to produce more meaningful outcomes than those networks without trust. Perna and Titus' (2005) study also provide support in terms of using Coleman's (1988) framework of social capital framework to examine parental involvement. They found that when parental involvement is examined through the lens of social capital it supports college enrollment by "conveying norms and standards" (p. 507).

The findings from this study elaborate in an exploratory way actual aspects of African American parental involvement that redefine the concept of parental involvement to that of village network. Hence, the village network of these students allows for specific characteristics to emerge such as the role of early college discourse, the church, and an

awareness of societal and cultural consciousness and how these operate in precollege preparation. From a macro perspective, these characteristics can then function to inform policy, practice, and research in terms of how to combat the low enrollment rates of African American students.

Furthermore, in answering the three research questions there emerged evidence to suggest that intergenerational closure, which is defined by Coleman (1988) as the closure of relationship between children, their parents, and actors outside the family, was active in the networks of these students. In this study there was evidence that was presented in chapter four, which showed that an extensive amount of intergenerational closure was occurring among members of the network. Examples of intergenerational closure were evident in terms of the participants' discussions with their friends, their parents' discussion with those same friends, as well as discussions with school counselors and church members regarding college.

Secondly, when viewed holistically the finding from all three research questions leads to a direct challenge of traditional models of parental involvement and the meaning of the word "family." The data clearly suggest that parental involvement and family structure for these participants were diverse and included individuals that were both related by blood ties and non-blood ties. This indicates that, when exploring the role of parental involvement in precollege preparation of African American students, the socio-historical nature of the collective and communal nature of the African American community must be considered as significant variables. This is crucial because the processes and mechanisms through which African American families communicate

values and norms regarding postsecondary plans are different from what has been reported in the literature regarding what affects college-going habits of all students (Freeman, 1999).

As such, parental involvement must not only include variables that deal with parent-school contact. Despite this being an important element for analysis for higher education researcher, policymakers and K-12 teachers and administrators, the equation needs to be expanded to include factors such as valuing school involvement by a godmother on the behalf the student. Tierney's (2002) research, in particular his concept of "cultural integrity" (p. 599), encourages the inclusion of students' racial and ethnic background in schooling, and enhances the findings of this study because it legitimizes cultural ways of transmitting knowledge and involvement about college preparation. The concept of cultural integrity helps contest certain "regime of truths" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131) involving definitions of family and parent involvement that are prevalent in American society. Given the barriers placed on parental involvement in minority communities such as caring for others members of community, working, language, previous experience with school, a reshaping of who is considered family or parental figures might prove to be a beneficial intervention in order to encourage more meaningful involvement by the members in the students' village network. As such, statements like bring your "mommy" or "daddy" to school might not be appropriate for some African American students if only a "family aunt" is able to attend a particular meeting. Thus,

in cases in which members of the immediate family (mother or father) are not in a position to influence the decision process, the role of the extended family in

influencing African American students' choosing to participate in higher education is particularly noteworthy. (Freeman, 1999, p. 9)

Third is the significant role of extracurricular activities such as sports as well as the role that church plays in precollege preparation. As stated previously, a surprising outcome of this study was the importance of sports in college preparation of these students. Given the ratio of males to females in this study the findings of the importance of sports in relation to scholarship and self-sufficiency extend an understanding of the village that was not expected in the planning of this study. There were more male than female participants in this study and the majority of the male participants were involved in athletics. Of the three females, only one was actively involved in playing sports. As such, sports in relation to economics was a dominant theme for the male participants. Freeman's (2005) book, *African American College Choice: The Influence of Family and School* provides a perspective on this issue in terms of gender, college choice, and the influence of athletics and academics among African American students. Based on her discussion with some of her participants regarding these issues, she concluded that, because of the perception that Black males get into college based on athletics, the student as a collective felt that obtaining a scholarship via athletics or academics was very important to the college process.

Likewise, O'Bryan, Braddock, and Dawkins' (2006) study of African American parental involvement and extracurricular participation found that participation in school based activities such as varsity sports had a positive correlation with parent-initiated discussions with the school in which their students attended. Contact was the same

despite the students' gender and the authors propose that involvement in extracurricular activities might be an avenue to increase parental involvement for African American students.

Despite the positive correlation between sports and parental involvement that was found by O'Bryan et al.'s (2006) study there is a cautionary warning to be observed in terms of the emphasis on athletic scholarships. This cautionary warning involves the extent to which an over-reliance on athletic scholarship interferes with academics, in particular with grades. Some of the participants in this study reflected on the tension between academics and athletics but in the end the awareness of the cost of college appeared to take precedent in terms of the financial burden involved in college preparation. Although participation in extracurricular activities was a significant aspect of the village network, the hindrances that may result if network members give the message that academics is important, but that an athletic scholarship is a more common method to enter college might be more detrimental to college persistence in the long run if these students are not academically prepared for college level work.

In considering the church's role in parental involvement, Coleman (1988) asserts that "in many black communities, the most powerful community institution is the church" (p. 37). Coleman unpacks this observation by outlining that because of the separation between church and state in American society schools are at a disadvantage because they are not able to fully harness social capital that is embedded in the church community. The participants in this study displayed that the church was an active part of their network and although none of them reported that their school formally reaches out to

their respective churches the participants and their families independently utilized the church in precollege preparation and created a network where information and life lessons gained from the church community was incorporated into precollege preparation.

As James explained;

James: She [pastor] keep me on the right path too. Like when I get bad grades, I got to talk to her about it.

Interviewer: So when you get bad grades you have to talk to her about it? And why and how does that work for you? Is that why you see her as a parental figure?

James: Like I can disappoint her too. Like she got a lot of love for me and I don't want to disappoint her either. I don't like disappointing nobody.

Interviewer: So when you get bad grades and you go and talk to your pastor, what do you guys talk about? Give me some examples if you can.

James: Like most of it is like I know I could have did better. What would the Lord think about it?

Interviewer: And that's important to you?

James: Yeah as a Christian in society you want to do both. You want to make good grades and do the right thing.

In supporting this participant's sentiment, I restate Billingsley and Caldwell's (1991) statement that the church does exercise influence over African American behavior because of its prominent role in the Black community. As such, institutions of higher education that are willing to build coalitions with churches in the African American community might find that they have a viable partner in terms of issues related to recruitment and retention.

Fourth, the finding regarding the specific ways in which parental involvement supports precollege preparation is beneficial to the existing literature because it provides a wider scope in understanding the mechanisms that support the oral narratives imparted to students regarding academic success, achievement, and college preparation. These

findings clearly embody a culturally relevant lens instead of one that is often laden with perspectives that subscribe to deficits models of involvement. According to Yosso (2005), “deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither values nor support their child’s education” (p. 75). Hence, the purpose of this study is not to quarrel with the existing literature instead the findings are meant to provide another voice, rethink ideological assumptions, and underscore the importance of counter narratives. The use of counter narratives and storytelling has had a long history in the African American community. Critical race theory scholars have underscored the importance of the counterstory in giving voice to the daily realities of African American communities. The data from this study provides some evidence of the counter discourse that unfolded in the communities of these students regarding college preparation, enrollment, and completion.

As discussed previously in Chapter IV, the village network in this study utilized tools such as early college discourse, in particularly discussing college as early as middle school, cognitive-behavioral detriments such as the use of encouragement and cautionary warnings, as well as academic preparation and conditioning such as providing students with socially conscious books to read, assisting with homework, and talking to other members of the village to promote the importance of preparation and college enrollment. These village ways of preparing for college as perceived by the participants represent Yosso’s (2005) concept of “community cultural wealth” (p. 70), which espouses that minority students bring to schooling valued cultural wealth from their communities that

can aid in academic performance and involvement. The myriad of stories shared in chapter four provides evidence that adjustability is a necessary component of epistemological, axiological, and ontological assumptions that are constructed to understand how parental involvement affects how African American students prepare for college.

Implications for Policy

State, federal, and institutional policies to increase the participation of African American students in institutions of higher education must consider the significance of socio-cultural, economical, and historical factors in how these students prepare for college. According to Abdul-Adil and Farmer (2006), urban reform in conjunction with federal legislation has placed an emphasis on parental involvement in schools as a national priority. Consequently, policymakers must be cognizant of dynamics such as a family structure, socioeconomic status, culture, race, and educational achievement and access to resources when implementing programs. Indisputably, policies that negate these factors will most likely fail. Hence, programs and policy recommendations that seek to increase African American participation in higher education must adopt a culturally relevant model of family and school involvement and should be buttressed by the research literature that has already established that African American families hold very high educational aspiration for their students (Jun & Colyar, 2002).

From a federal perspective, increasing the amount of monies or resources available to K-12 institutions to initiate or restructure current parental involvement programs is an early intervention strategy that may increase more African American

participation in higher education. The findings from this study indicate that the participants and their communities were highly involved in precollege preparation in non-traditional ways. In addition, the tools and strategies employed by members of the participants' social network were extensive, diverse, and innovative. Since funding from the federal government in the form of Title 1 aid often supports parental involvement programs (Mattingly, Prislun, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002), K-12 institutions can then use this kind of funding to create parent involvement programs that adopt the village network approach identified in this study to buoy precollege planning.

Mattingly et al. (2002), in their evaluation of 41 parental involvement programs, concluded that the evidence was inconclusive that parental involvement programs were effective in terms of academic achievement. They point to flaws in how these programs are designed as possible sources undermining their evaluation. Abdul-Adil and Farmer (2006) argue that current parental involvement especially with inner city students "are hampered by problems of research methodology (e.g. lack of consensus definition and operationalization) and program foci (e.g. conceptualization, communication, and collaboration)" (p. 8). Increasing the amount of federal funding for parental involvement program that adopted a more culturally relevant village network model of involvement might improve the effectiveness of such programs thereby making college more of a reality for minority students especially those from families with a low socioeconomic status.

In addition to policies that create parental involvement programs at the K-12 level, colleges and universities can also increase enrollment by expanding their

involvement in precollege programs. Upward Bound is a famous example of a precollege preparation program aimed at increasing minority participation in higher education. Since States are allotted various grants and funding, creating access to precollege programs that connect the university campus to village networks of students can only be a benefit to students. This collaboration with the village network model presented in this study could include colleges and universities especially admission departments to help demystify the college application process. In this study, one participant mentioned visiting a college campus, and two participants mentioned being involved in a precollege program. As such, providing more access to precollege programming would most likely increase these numbers and assist in a better understanding of the meanings (economic self sufficiency, societal and cultural consciousness, and institutional forces) that the students attributed to parental involvement. For example, high school counselors and college admission counselors could work together to bridge the gap between African American students and college by providing access to information, college culture, and college transitions (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006).

In summary, federal, state and institutional policies that recognize how socio-cultural factors affect precollege preparation for African American students can only serve to increase enrollment. It is important to note, that policymakers should not conclude that African American students and their family are looking for special treatment but are more interested in having their narratives legitimized in the college-going process. The voices of these 12 participants give credence to the myriad of issues facing policymakers especially in the area of educational equity. Listening to the voices

of these African American students and not just those in society concerned with upholding the old American adage of “pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps” is a counter narrative that reflects a new axiom which is that “it takes a village to raise a child.”

Implications for Practice

Institutions of higher education as well as other internal and external constituents are facing a crisis while the American society is now more diverse than any other time its history, the student body of many postsecondary institutions do not reflect this demographical reality. African American participation in college continues to lag and poses a significant threat for a society that views education as the great equalizer. Universities and college faculty and administrators will need to create innovative, diverse, and comprehensive strategies to combat this issue. One opportunity to create such programming is in the area of practice.

Findings from three research questions suggest that some African American students are coming to college campuses from communities that have extensive social networks where decision making about college is more collective in nature. As such, recruitment materials should reflect of the institution’s mission, especially its commitment to diversity and inclusiveness. According to Flowers (2004), institutions that have goals that are aligned with those of students create an environment that fosters commitment from the student. This is important because research on minority retention and recruitment has uncovered multiple variables that affect racial and ethnic minority recruitment and retention. They are as follows: precollege characteristics, students’

perception of their goals and perception of institutional commitment, and student's perception of the institutional environment (Flowers, 2004; Swail, 2003; Tierney, 1999).

From a practice perspective, colleges and universities should ensure that communications with the African American community should reflect how the institution values various perspectives as well as keen sensitivity to racial and cultural characteristics that guide these communities. So for example, recruitment fairs should utilize village networks in order to maximize impact because the findings of this study show that these networks are multilayered with aspects of intergenerational closure (Coleman, 1988), which is excellent catalyst for disseminating information about college. More specifically, recruitment fairs should clearly outline the types of scholarships and academic commitments that will be needed by the students. This is crucial because many of the participants in this study placed getting a scholarship as primary in terms of their college enrollment. Also, because of the high number of participants who were involved in athletics recruitment, administrators should delineate the likelihood of receiving athletic scholarship with an emphasis placed on balancing athletics and academics. Thus, contacting a local church in the community in order to conduct a college fair might reach more families than campus-held fairs. However, if the decision is to have a college fair on campus then administrators should make to efforts to ensure that message is received that all members of the network are welcomed.

In addition to recruitment fairs is role of athletics in exposing African American students the institutions of higher education. Since involvement in athletics was such a dominant theme in this study, university and colleges interested in having a

diverse and inclusive campus environment can offer summer sports programs that will have a dual purpose. Not only will the students participate in sports but also academics. In such a program, the students might live on the university campus for a few weeks in the summer, attend classes as well as become involved in various campus organizations. A daily schedule should include classes, sports, assistantships, and a daily support group facilitated by a faculty and peer mentor with whom the students would have contact when they return to their communities. The summer program would culminate in a completed project by each student. This end of summer project might take the form of a presentation, artistic performance, or mode of delivery that was selected by the student, and might be presented at a luncheon that would be attended by the students' village network. Such a pre-college summer program would expose the students to campus life, and academics, which would aid in overall pre-college preparation.

Another intervention that has implication for practice is in the area of university publications. More specifically, brochures, websites, and overall university publications should reflect aspects of the village network. In this manner, admissions and orientation departments should be cognizant of the kinds of images that are on informational materials which are sent to students. So for example, admissions brochures that targets African American students might have a picture of an older individual appearing to be a grandmother, or a clergy official involved in the decision making process or even participating in a campus visit. Thus, having recruitment materials reflecting the village network should send the message that the campus is inclusive of all types of family structures.

Furthermore, since the data revealed that early college discourse began as early as middle school; institutions of higher education should begin targeting African Americans with college-bound programming as early as middle school. Programs should be offered on the weekend giving the students the opportunity to bring their parental figures and village members to these sessions. At these sessions, students and their families should be introduced to pertinent information about college attendance, financial aid, programs, and mentoring.

In addition to recruitment practices, orientation programming should adopt a more inclusive approach to include all members of the students' village network. Orientation materials should be inclusive and welcoming the students' village network to participate in the students' transition to college. Student affairs professionals can serve as sources of information for African American students who might be new to the surrounding community by providing information regarding local churches, community centers, and sports teams. Also, for those students who might be new to the community to provide linkages with African American organizations on campus or create a buddy or peer guide to navigate campus and the surrounding community.

In terms of implications for practice, the role of faculty is significant in African precollege preparation. This is an example of how policy and practice become interconnected. As the result of the meanings that these African American participants attributed to parental involvement (economic self sufficiency, societal and cultural consciousness, and institutional forces) faculty can help to facilitate connections with students and their families from general inquiry, campus visits, and formal applications to

the campus. I call this pre-mentoring because faculty via telephone calls or even attending recruitment fairs can help the students to build realistic expectation regarding college and what is expected with the institutions. The importance of mentoring is an important tool for universities and colleges especially with African American students because “historically, mentoring in higher education has proven to be a valuable and effective tool in promoting interaction between student and faculty. African American men in particular have reaped the benefits of formally structured mentoring programs in college and universities” (Lavant, Anderson, & Tiggs, 1997, p. 43). Early college mentoring might help to increase action such a participating in a campus visit which might decrease some of the hesitations regarding college.

In summary, the implications for practice as a result of this study suggest that collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs and should include (a) more innovative and culturally relevant recruitment strategies; (b) more access to campus by members of the students’ social network; (c) faculty pre-college mentoring; (d) a more inclusiveness mission statement; and (e) more grants and financial assistance.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research using a social capital framework to examine the role of parental involvement in the precollege preparation of African American students should and must include a definition of parental involvement that is more robust and culturally relevant. Future researchers should examine closely the importance of kinship and non kinship relationships and the ways in which these relationships contest and create a space for more a socio-culturally laden understanding of African American social networks.

Furthermore, the extant literature has given voice to the role of parental involvement in minority communities from the perspective of school administrators and teachers, policymakers, and parents. However, more studies need to be conducted from the perspective of students. Listening to the voices of students will provide another lens from which to connect research, theory and practice. From a constructivist standpoint, the term parental involvement and family are socially constructed therefore in order to understand how these two concepts affect African American students, frameworks and methodologies that have only utilized White middle class populations will unequivocally de-legitimize the role of race, class, and culture.

An expansion of this study would be a longitudinal one that would follow these students once they are actually enrolled in college. The purpose of this would be to investigate whether their village networks continue to have an impact in terms of decision making in college as they confront issues of oppression, alienation, psychosocial and cognitive changes, academic and social adjustments, and goal planning. This type of study would assist in underscoring areas of the network that strengthen college performance to aid in recruitment, retention, and ultimately graduation. In addition, given the emphasis on sports in this study a further extension for future research would specifically examine parents' perception of precollege preparation, in particular their views on sports. As such researchers, policymakers, higher education and K-12 administrators, and the African American community will all possess knowledge to assist African American students in the pipeline to college.

Conclusion

I conclude this study with a polemic that calls for a reconsidering of the term parental involvement especially pertaining to how it affects the precollege preparation of African American students. Undoubtedly, the achievement gap between minorities and their White college-going counterparts continues to cast a shadow on future democratic participation for all America's citizens. Therefore, a new paradigm that considers the social capital created by village networks is a useful lens in considering strategies to increase the overall participation of African Americans in institutions of higher education. It is important to outline that by no means is this study stating that all African American students view parental involvement in precollege preparation in the same manner as these study participants. However, the findings from this study broadens the dialogue regarding the types of variables, definitions, and complexities involved creating strategies that may increase African American college enrollment. This study's findings suggest that examining parental involvement through the lens of social capital uncovers areas of strengths that are not found in the current research literature. These areas of strengths should be considered in any serious discourse regarding African American precollege preparation.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Statement for Pastors to Read to the Congregation

Cherrel Miller, who is a student at UNCG, is recruiting students for her dissertation research. Her study will examine students' perception of parental involvement in the precollege preparation of African American students. As such, she is recruiting African American students who are currently enrolled in school in either grades 10, 11 or 12. These students should have the intention of attending a two-year community college or a four-year college or university. If you are interested please see her at the back of the church after service and she will explain her study in further detail.

Appendix B

Consent to Act as a Human Participant

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: SHORT FORM WITH ORAL PRESENTATION

Project Title: Social Capital as Village Network: The Role of Parental Involvement in the Precollege Preparation of African American Students

Project Director: Dr. David Ayers

Participant's Name: _____

Cherrel Miller has explained in the preceding oral presentation the procedures involved in this research project including the purpose and what will be required of you. Any benefits and risks were also described. Cherrel Miller has answered all of your current questions regarding your participation in this project. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Dr. David Ayers by calling 336-256-1368 or Cherrel Miller by calling 336-334-3441. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in the project described to you by Cherrel Miller.

Participant's Signature

Date

Witness* to Oral Presentation
and Participant's Signature

*Investigators and data collectors may not serve as witnesses. Subjects, family members, and persons unaffiliated with the study may serve as witnesses.

Signature of person obtaining consent on behalf of
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Date

Appendix C

Children's Assent Form

I am doing a study to try to learn about how African American students view the role of parental involvement in how they prepare for college. I am asking you to help because we don't know very much about how African American students view the role of parental involvement in helping them prepare for college.

If you agree to be in my study, I am going to ask you some questions about your plans for college. I am specifically interested in your views regarding college preparation. For example, you will be asked questions such as whom in your family talks to you about college as well what are your earliest memories of talking about college. This study includes two 90 minute interviews, and one 2 hour focus group.

You can ask questions at any time that you might have about this study. Also, if you decide at any time not to finish this study, you may stop whenever you want. Remember, these questions are only about what you think. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you and that you want to be in the study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign the paper. Remember, being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you don't sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You can ask any question that you have about this study. There are no direct benefits to you for being in this study; however your views about college preparation will help to inform the literature on college preparation. This is a minimal risk study and your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

All interview and transcript information will be stored in a locked file in my office the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, to which only I will have access. All data will be shredded and destroyed within three years following the closure of this project.

Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Dr. David Ayers by calling 336-256-1368 or Cherrel Miller by calling 336-334-3441. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Appendix D

Oral Presentation to Participants

My name is Cherrel Miller and I am Ph.D. student at University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am conducting research for my dissertation examining African American students' perception of parental involvement in their precollege preparation. As such, I am recruiting African American students who are currently enrolled in school in either grades 10, 11 or 12 and who have the intention to attend a two-year community college or a four-year college or university.

If you with your parents/guardian permission agree to be in this study you will be required to participate in two 90 minutes interviews, and two hour focus group. These interviews will take place at a place and time that is convenient to you. Your information will be stored in a locked file cabinet on the campus of University of North Carolina at Greensboro until May 2009, after this date your information will be stored in a locked cabinet at my home. Audiotapes will be dismantled and the interview and focus group transcripts will be shredded. **All data for this study will be destroyed three years following the closure of this project.** You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice. In addition, your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to ask any questions. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved this research and this consent form. There is no risk to you if you agree to participate in this study. However, if you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project they can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by Cherrel Miller by calling 336-334-3441. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

Please be aware that there are no individual benefits for your participation in this study however, your participation in this study will help the wider society understand the meanings of parental involvement and college preparation from an African American student perspective.

Appendix E
Parental Recruitment Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a Ph.D. student at UNCG. I want to learn more about students' perception of parental involvement in precollege preparation. By creating a broader definition of the role of parental involvement in precollege preparation of African American students, this research aims to increase the enrollment of African American students in institutions of higher education. There are no direct benefits to participants, although they may benefit from this opportunity to discuss their college plans.

As part of this research study, participants will participate in 2 ninety interviews and one 2 hours focus group. Participant's names will not be published and their name will be changed to protect their identity. All interview and transcript information will be stored in a locked file in my office the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, to which only I will have access. All data will be shredded and destroyed within three years following the closure of this project. This is a minimal risk study. Please understand that your permission is voluntary and you may withdraw your permission at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at UNCG at (336)-334-3441 or by emailing me at cmille5@uncg.edu or my dissertation Advisor, Dr. David Ayers at (336) 256-1368 or dfayers@uncg.edu.

Appendix F

Research Identity Memo

For five years worked as a social worker in communities of color in New York City. As a clinician, I have had the privilege of working with many minority families with school age children. As a result, I have dealt with a myriad of psychosocial issues (mental illness, abuse and neglect, perinatal bereavement, substance abuse, homelessness, grief and loss, and school related issues) affecting these families. It is the contrast between my own childhood and family experiences (one that was privileged, and honestly it took me a very long time, after many discussions with friends regarding White privilege to define my childhood as privilege) and the harsh realities that faced these families that provide me with past experiences that are relevant to my topic. I count myself blessed to have been a sort of “social work ethnographer” because a large percent of my time was spent in the minority communities of New York visiting my clients’ homes, going with them to court, school, and other places that they required extra support. So my research interest is not just an intellectual one but is derived from the life-changing experience of my personal and professional experiences (my story).

The assumptions that I bring regarding this topic is that there is something positive in the word “family” that can propel Black students to succeed educationally. I am a believer in the benefits of a college education and I believe that families have the potential to produce capital and it is this capital I believe will enable Black students to persist in college. I had tremendous social capital in my family. Very early I knew I had no other choice but to obtain a college education. My mother reminded me (very clearly

and forcefully) throughout my childhood about the importance of a university education. In addition, working with these families in New York taught me ways of coping that I would have never considered. These families are resilient and creative. They might not have had much money (human capital) but they have extended social networks including the community and other family members (social capital). It is for these reasons why I strongly believe that “family” or parental involvement if redefined can propel minority students to achieve educationally.

The goals that have become important to my research is that I am hoping to uncover ways of increase Black student college enrollment by identifying factors that empower these students and their families. I hope to identify resources within the family unit that can positively contribute to higher college enrollment. I believe that knowledge is power and by gaining a college education minority students can contribute to their communities thus changing the status quo.

As a Black woman, mother and wife, I concerned and frustrated at how Black children and their families are perceived in terms of educational achievement. In this society it is often easier to blame the victim than to examine the institutionalized components that functions as barriers to achievement. At the core, these are the reasons why I have chosen this research topic. My goal in getting an education is not just for the private good of increasing my socioeconomic status, but to contribute civically to my society. To bring awareness to these issues and to become what Gramsci calls an “organic intellectual” because my hopes, dreams and research are derived from life experiences of a people that have marginalized for too long.

I cannot change the fact that I am a Black woman and that I view the world from an empowerment perspective. This provides advantages and at the same time disadvantage in terms of the population that I want to study. Because I am a part of the group I am studying I might be easily trusted by the participant, while at the same time, I have to be careful that my thoughts and feelings, and actions are not biased toward this group.

Appendix G

Interview Protocol: Interview One

These 5 questions should be short and quick. They are to establish Background:

1. What school are you attending?
2. Is it a public or private school?
3. Do you plan to attend college?
4. When do you plan to enter?
5. What has your school experience been like so far?

These 3 questions are to establish who the participants identifies as parental figures in his/her life as well as establish aspects of early school involvement

6. Tell me about who you identify in your life as a parental figure and why?
7. How are they involved in your school and school decisions?
8. Tell me about your earliest memory involving discussions about college?

These 3 questions will hopefully uncover the meanings that the participants equate with college and college preparation.

9. What does the word college mean to you?
10. When you hear the words college preparation what does this mean to you?
11. In what ways have your parental figure/s contributed to your understanding of preparing for college?

These 4 questions are to understand the connection between the participant, the parental figure/s and other community and school officials.

12. Have your parental figure/s had any discussions with school officials or other community member regarding preparing you for college.
13. Tell me about any books or movies or other things that you and your parental figure/s might have done in regards to preparing for college?
14. Do you have discussions with school officials, friends, or others community preparing for college?
15. What has been the most helpful thing that your parental figure has done or said regarding college?

These final questions are meant to cause reflections for participant and to place college preparation in broader context in particular looking at future goals.

16. How do you think college will be most helpful to you?
17. Is there anyone else that you think of as a parental figure?
18. Do you think your school can prepare you for college?
19. What is the most important lesson that you will take away from preparing for college?

Appendix H

Interview Protocol: Interview Two

Background of Parental Figures, college involvement, and significant vs. non-significant roles

1. Did your parental figure/s attend college?
2. What is your opinion on this statement “people who have not gone to college cannot help prepare their students for college”?
3. If the parental figure/s that you mentioned in your first interview were not involved in your college preparation, how would preparing for college be different for you?
4. Discuss if your parental figure/s has placed an emphasis on different ways to get into college such as through sports, academics, scholarships etc?
5. What is your definition of parental involvement?
6. What are some ways in which parental figures can help get their students ready for college?
7. Do you believe that there is a difference between how Black and White parental figures prepare their students for college?
8. From your experience in preparing for college with your parental figure/s, what advise would you give to other parental figures regarding preparing students for college?
9. In what ways are your parental figures not preparing you for college?
10. Can you remember a time when your parental figure/s spoke to your friends about preparing for college?
11. Are there instances where your parental figure/s talk to other parents about you preparing for college?

Societal Influences: Sports, Media, Friends

12. Why is playing sports, going into the army, or participating in other extra-curricular activity an important way to prepare for and get into college?
13. Discuss your feelings on whether there is too much emphasis on the role of sports in helping Black students get into college?
14. In what ways do you believe the media such as TV contributes to your understanding of what college is like?
15. What you see on TV regarding college is it different from what your parental figures have told you about college?
16. Tell me how your friends have helped you prepare for college?
17. When thinking about preparing for college what do you think are the key issues that students should be aware of?

Emotional Impacts, College as a Stage in Human Development, Ambivalence

18. Why is going to college important to you?
19. Do you have any fears regarding college?
20. What kinds of questions do you have about college?
21. Can you tell me some positive as well as negative things that your parental figure/s has said about college?
22. In preparing for college explain why having discipline is important?

Race, Curriculum, and School Impact

23. Does being an African American student affect how you prepare for college?
24. Are there ways in which African American parental figure/s prepare African American students for college?
25. Considering your present high school, do you believe that what is being taught is relevant to the experiences of an African American students preparing for college?
26. In the previous interviews some students have stated what they see as the differences between CP and Honors Classes. Can you explain what these classes are and how important they are to preparing for college?

27. What do you think the society at large should know about how African American students like yourselves prepare for college preparation?

Appendix I

Focus Group Protocol

1. Discuss your experiences of being in this study?
2. Did participating in this study help you think more deeply about college preparation?
3. Most of you stated that your earliest memories of having a discussion about college came from middle school, why do you think it is important to have early discussions about college?
4. What do you hope this study will tell others about the role of parental involvement in how African American students prepare for college?
5. Discuss your feelings on the role of the African American community in helping its students prepare for college?
6. Is race an issue in terms of how African American students prepare for college?
7. Most of you have identified family, friends, godparents, the church, as well as others who are currently helping you prepare for college, if you did not have these individuals helping you would preparing for college be the same?
8. Before this study, did you ever think that you had so many parental figure/s involved in you preparing for college?
9. How will your parental figure/s be affected if you complete college?
10. How will your parental figure/s be affected if you do not attend college?
11. Can you think of any questions that should have been asked that were not?
12. Have you had any negative experience in preparing for college?
13. What thoughts and feelings will you take away from this study?